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Abstract

The 'public interest' has long been used as a concept to justify planning activity. However, attempts to specify how to determine the public interest have been so plagued with problems that the concept has been effectively abandoned by academia in recent years. This article stresses the ongoing relevance of the public interest concept in planning but does so in a way that reconceives what it entails. This article argues that central to the concept of the public interest is how 'the subject' is conceived. It is contended that the currently prevalent collaborative and agonistic approaches to planning present a deficient understanding of the subject as one detached from the intersubjectively formed moral frameworks that provide understanding of context and supply bearing for action. This article seeks to address this deficit by introducing the philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre to a planning audience. MacIntyre's communitarian perspective offers an alternative view of the subject by stressing how an evaluation of what constitutes the public interest is unavoidably undertaken from within a shared tradition of moral reasoning. Thus, from a MacIntyrean position, the public interest should not be assumed to simply constitute the end product of correct procedures. This article highlights the importance of acknowledging how identifying the public interest demands situated ethical judgement. The concluding section of this article details the dangers for planning theory and practice of failing to acknowledge this phenomenon.

Keywords

MacIntyre, planning theory, public interest, the subject, virtue ethics

Introduction

The 'public interest' has long been used to justify planning as an activity that restricts certain private property rights (Alexander, 2002; Alfasi, 2009; Moroni, 2004). In particular, scholarship has explored how the public interest concept has been advanced to legitimise planning activities conducted by the state (Campbell and Marshall, 2002) and as a

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norm invoked by practitioners when seeking to ground their activities (Campbell and Marshall, 2000). This research has demonstrated how many of the traditional arguments for planning in the public interest are rooted in the perception of it as a 'technical' profession predicated on the possession of design skills and conducted according to a model of rational comprehensive decision-making (Campbell, 2012a; Owens and Cowell, 2011). However, such research also stresses how this linear view of planning has been thoroughly undermined over the past four decades.¹ Indeed, it is now generally accepted that planning is an inherently political activity, informed by values and often conducted against a backdrop of competing interests and power asymmetries (Allmendinger, 2009; Campbell, 2012b; Fainstein, 2010; Gunder and Hillier, 2009; Hendler, 1995; Tait and Campbell, 2000; Thomas, 1994). This view has weakened the position of the public interest justification for planning. Indeed, there now exists a well-established critical suspicion of potentially universalising concepts that approach the idea of the public interest in planning with a significant degree of cynicism (Sandercock, 1997). Some have gone further in suggesting that the idea of the public interest provides little more than 'a flexible construct for the articulation of disparate views' (Grant, 1994: 73), as contending positions exploit the public interest concept to support their arguments. Moreover, recent research has empirically demonstrated the difficulty experienced by planning practitioners in identifying what the 'common good' or the 'public interest' may entail (Murphy and Fox-Rogers, 2015). This side-lining of the public interest concept has been reinforced by the current prevalence of collaborative-oriented approaches in planning academia (Brand and Gaffikin, 2007; Healey, 2003, 2005, 2012; Innes and Booher, 2010) and the growing interest in agonistic theory (Bond, 2011; Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004) which generally eschew rather than contest debate on what may constitute the public interest.

Nevertheless, the public interest endures if not in name, then certainly in spirit, as prominent theorists make valuable contributions to discussion on how we can ensure that planning operates as an ethically attuned activity focused on 'justice' (Basta, 2015; Campbell, 2006; Fainstein, 2010; Flyvbjerg, 2004; Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008; Schlosberg, 2013). This resonates with Flatman's (1966) assertion regarding the idea of the public interest that 'We are free to abandon the concept but if we do so we simply have to wrestle with the problems under some other heading' (p. 13). Ultimately, this leaves us with the question as to how the public interest should be understood. This article tackles this issue by proposing that the public interest should not be conceived as something 'out there' to be identified or produced through a rational procedure of deliberation. Instead, it is contended that the public interest must be perceived as something 'in here' which is identified through engagement with the ethical complexities of a context through employing the interpretive tools supplied to one by the moral frameworks in which one is inevitably embedded. In seeking to advance this argument, this article presents and deploys a meta-theoretical perspective inspired by the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre. Although enjoying reasonably high profile in political and moral philosophy, the potential of MacIntyre's work is largely unexplored in the context of planning theory (however, see Lennon, 2015). Thus, this article offers an original theoretical framework for exploring how planning's public interest can and ought to be comprehended. Specifically, this article advances the argument that how the 'moral subject'

is conceived in planning is central to understanding how the public interest is and ought to be understood.

In making this case, the remainder of this article is organised into four sections. The next section outlines and critically appraises the conceptions of the subject implicit in the collaborative and agonistic models of planning which have gained an increasing hold in planning theory in recent years. The subsequent section introduces MacIntyre's moral philosophy and identifies how this presents a useful counterpoint to the model of the subject advanced by collaborative and agonistic planning theories. Following this, the relationship of the MacIntyrean subject to the practice of planning is examined and used to explore the potential this supplies for reconceptualising how the public interest is identified. The final section of this article draws upon the preceding discussion to highlight the deficiencies of the collaborative and agonistic planning approaches for identifying what the public interest is and should be. This article closes by outlining how a MacIntyrean-styled analysis of the moral subject offers a better understanding of how planning's public interest may be conceived.

The (post)modern 'subject'

Much planning theory over the past half century has been informed by a liberal tradition in political philosophy. Although he never intended his constitutional-level philosophy to be applied to 'the everyday situated judgments of planning' (Campbell, 2006: 93), John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls, 1971) has proved immensely influential in the field of planning theory. Rawls' (1971) focus on the idea of 'justice as fairness' has a strong ethical dimension that seeks to locate principles 'to govern the assignment of rights and duties and to regulate the distribution of social and economic advantages' (p. 61). Rawls' strategy in pursuing these principles is to formulate a thought experiment that imagines an 'original position' and 'veil of ignorance' whereby ensuring fairness is connected to ignorance such that people are asked to develop the principles of distribution governing a world into which they will enter not knowing the circumstances into which they will be born (rich, poor, gifted, average, etc.). In Rawls' view, people in the original position, denied knowledge of their aptitudes and endowments, will not be driven by a certain concept of 'the good' but instead by interest in devising a set of principles that guarantees their liberty, greatest socio-economic benefit and a capacity to attain positions of wealth and influence. For Rawls (1971), this will logically result in people choosing to formulate a series of rational principles that maximise fairness by instituting a system of justice that supplies the most extensive organisation of basic liberties for everybody and furnishes equality of opportunity for all (p. 302). Of note is that in Rawls' view, the concept of the 'good' is to be determined subsequent to the establishment and institutionalisation of these principles. Hence, 'the good' is to be 'produced' following the institutionalisation of the principles of justice through debate among people enjoying equality of opportunity, rather than pre-emptively steering deliberation on what principles of justice should be formulated and institutionalised. Thus, the principles governing a just society are connected to a conception of fairness established by subjects capable of assuming an objective 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986) in the self-interested pursuit of a form of distribution that provides them with the best chance of socio-economic success. In

essence, therefore, the views held by people concerning what may constitute the public interest are to be suspended as they engage with this thought experiment. Accordingly, Rawls is suggesting that it is possible for actors to detach themselves from prior conceptions of 'the good' in following a logic of rational self-interest to first devise a form of societal arrangement from which the concept of 'the good' can be produced (Sandel, 1982). In this sense, the Rawlsian subject who muses on how to better society is initially conceived as existing outside a history of ethical debate on what may constitute the public interest such that the desire to create a more just society is imagined to exist prior to the determination of 'the good'.

Of comparable influence to contemporary planning theory has been the work of Jürgen Habermas. Like Rawls, his constitutional-level political philosophy was never intended for application in planning. Nevertheless, his model of 'communicative rationality' has proved especially important in shaping how many believe Rawls' idea of 'justice as fairness' can be delivered in the context of planning activity (Healey, 1993, 2003). Indeed, the Habermas-informed communicative or collaborative planning approach has been to the fore of planning theory debates since it gained traction in the 1980s to the extent that by the mid-1990s, Innes (1995) felt justified proclaiming that it could become the dominant paradigm in planning theory. Although collaborative planning has since been challenged from a variety of renowned sources (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Fainstein, 2010; Huxley and Yiftachel, 2000; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998), it has retained a high degree of prominence amid an ever-increasing landscape of contending theoretical positions (Bond, 2011). At the heart of collaborative planning is the concept of 'collaborative rationality'. According to Innes and Booher (2015),

Collaborative rationality is an adaptation from the idea of communicative rationality to real-world practices of collaborative policy making with stakeholders. The basic idea is that a decision can be collaboratively rational if it incorporates diverse and interdependent stakeholders who engage in authentic dialogue around a shared task. The ground rules of this dialogue establish expectations that participants will speak sincerely, be legitimate representatives of an interest, and provide accurate and comprehensible information. (p. 209)

Here, the 'subject' engaged in deliberation is conceived as an actor both seeking to and capable of suspending their prejudices when 'speaking sincerely' in an 'authentic dialogue' concerning a shared task, such as in making a decision on a divisive planning issue. To supply the conditions necessary to facilitate such an authentic dialogue, it is advocated that interlocutors should jointly agree to construct a means of interaction that enables the suspension of any bias they may carry (Healey, 2003; Innes, 1996). From this perspective, those engaged in collaborative planning are implicitly conceived as rational actors striving for consensus on decisions between all parties involved in deliberations. Although noble in its objectives, this perspective has been criticised for ignoring the power dynamics inherent to interactions between unequally positioned interlocutors (Purcell, 2009; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998; Young, 2000). However, a deeper problem with the collaborative planning approach is the inferred notion that the views of actors concerning the public interest may simply be fashioned as an end product of such rational engagement.² As noted by Innes and Booher (2015),

Although participants do not come into the process looking for the public interest, as they accommodate diverse interests, the proposals come closer to something that can be viewed as in the common good. (p. 205)

This perspective on the formation of the public interest is advanced by the idea that actors can simply choose to bracket their biases in constructing a form of interaction that facilitates an ‘authentic dialogue’ which ultimately produces consensus on what the ‘common good’ entails. Emphasis is thus laid on establishing procedures to facilitate authentic dialogue, or put differently, the public interest is conceived to lie in establishing the proper procedures for decision-making. This thereby evacuates matters of normative substance from debate and substitutes them with norms of fair procedure (Ricoeur, 1995). The effect of this is to equate whatever is produced by way of fair procedure with the public interest. Herein lies a Kantian fallacy³ of supposed universal applicability by implying that planning can occur in a vacuum free of contingency if only the proper procedures are adhered to in ‘producing’ decisions that amount to the public interest. This is consequent on the way collaborative planning risks ignoring how the precepts upon which it operates are themselves located within a place- and time-bound manner of reasoning that presumes a certain ontology of the subject, and how this subject relates to the community in which they are embedded. Consequently, those who uncritically advance collaborative planning conflate procedure with the public interest. Ultimately, this is consequent on how the collaborative planning approach relies on modern liberal political theory for an ‘asocial’ model of the subject.

Challenging the prominence of collaborative planning and gaining ever-increasing purchase within planning theory is the ‘agonistic planning’ approach (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo, 2010; Hillier, 2003; McClymont, 2011; Pløger, 2004). In contrast to the liberal political perspective advanced by collaborative planning, the agonistic planning approach is grounded in political pluralism (Connolly, 1995; Honig, 1993), and in particular the post-modern political philosophy of Chantal Mouffe (2000). For Mouffe (1999) and others of this persuasion (Grange, 2014; Griggs and Howarth, 2013), the assumptions of collaborative planning seek to neutralise politics by institutionalising a neo-liberal post-political order that facilitates exploitation and the suppression of difference. In countering this, such theorist stresses the impossibility of seeking durable consensus consequent on the view that political engagement is intrinsically antagonistic and at best only ‘exists as a temporary result of a provisional hegemony’ (Mouffe, 1999: 756). Building upon the ancient Greek concept of *agon* (‘struggle’), the agonistic planning approach conceives the subject as one who is engaged in a contest with others to advance his or her objectives in a field of competing voices (Roskamm, 2014). In this sense, those advancing the agonistic planning approach are highly suspect of assertions concerning the ability or even willingness of interlocutors to extricate bias from deliberations. This is because the agonistic approach focuses attention on ‘the political’ as the ‘ineradicable character’ of power (Mouffe, 1999: 752) such that the durable consensus sought by collaborative planning is perceived as an impossibility.

Accordingly, what those advocating such an agonistic perspective assert is that institutions should be designed in response to the reality of an inextinguishable plurality of contending interests, rather than in the unrealistic expectation that participants to a debate

will not seek to steer deliberations in their favour. These institutions should be devised to enable contending voices to find a level of agreement that provides the scope necessary to move forward in tackling, if never permanently resolving debatable issues such as the distribution of benefits, which so frequently occupy planning debates (Pløger, 2004). Hence, the objectives of political institutions, such as those governing the operation of planning, should be 'to transform antagonism into agonism' (Mouffe, 2011: 20). Here, the 'enemies' or antagonism should be reconceived as 'adversaries' who oppose yet recognise the legitimacy of their opponents in a relationship of mutual respect and reciprocity.

A notable feature of such thinking is its focus on 'the political' as an abstract theory of power with comparatively little attention allocated to specifying the nature of the 'subject' operating within this framework. However, given the pluralistic view of society and the prescription for tackling dispute advanced by this approach, it can be deduced that the 'subject' in the context of agonistic planning is one who seeks the establishment of governance institutions solely as a means of taming antagonism such that actors may civilly seek to further their specific interests in a field of other actors with contending objectives. Therefore, the 'subject' of agonistic planning can be deduced as one motivated by self-interest in pursuing a course of action aimed at capitalising on opportunities to advance their interests in competition with others. From this perspective, the concept of the public interest emerges as the end product of subjects engaged in the politics of negotiating a trade-off between their relative interests, such that 'the good' is equated with the production of mutually agreeable ends that at best temporarily resolves disagreement.

Thus, at first, it might appear that the modern liberalism underpinning views on the universal applicability of collaborative planning is wholly at odds to the anti-foundational post-modern pluralism of agonistic planning. However, on closer inspection, it emerges that both approaches share a concept of an individualistic subject capable of detachment from a received legacy of intersubjectively formed concepts of 'the good' when engaging in debates on how best to advance the public interest. This results in an understanding of 'the good' as something produced consequent on establishing appropriate methods for political engagement. Hence, both these approaches foreground a 'procedural a priori' in which the desire to resolve conflict allocates priority to 'means' such that 'ends' (the public interest) are downgraded to the product of proper process. The individualistic subject implicitly conceived in both these approaches is antithetical to the understanding of the relationship between 'the subject' and concepts of 'the good' advanced by communitarian thinkers⁴ (Bell, 1993; Etzioni, 1994; Sandel, 1982; Taylor, 1989; Walzer, 1983). For such theorists, much of our lives are governed by involuntary ways of thinking and doing consequent on a legacy of reasoning inherited, (re)interpreted and transmitted by the society in which we are embedded. In this sense, communitarian theorists contend that the radical subjectivity of the 'asocial individual' advanced by modern liberal and pluralist political philosophy is intrinsically misconceived. Accordingly, for communitarian theorists, the public interest cannot simply be produced as an end process of proper procedure. Instead, particular conceptions of 'the good' are seen to precede the motivation for new procedures by informing shared views on 'why' new procedures are required, 'what' they should entail and 'how' they should operate. As such, a communitarian inspired reading of the 'subject' and its relationship to notions of

‘the good’ supplies an alternative route to theorising how planning’s public interest can be understood. In particular, the moral philosophy of Alasdair MacIntyre offers an analysis of the subject’s relationship to the activities they engage in that furnishes a coherent framework for reconceptualising planning’s public interest. At the heart of MacIntyre’s thesis is that the views held by the subject are, at least initially, intersubjectively formed.

The intersubjective ‘subject’

MacIntyre’s critique of modern moral philosophy centres on a desire to expose the ideological pretensions and lack of self-awareness of those who explicitly or implicitly advance an ‘objective’ approach to reasoning what ‘the good’ entails. He traces this malaise back to the Enlightenment Project that promised to release humanity from the intellectual restrictions born of explanations framed through unscientific supposition (MacIntyre, 1984). In essence, he conceives the Enlightenment Project as resting on a desire to ‘free’ society from superstition and the perceived capriciousness of nature through the use of unencumbered reasoning such that ‘the concept of freedom ... constitutes the keystone of the whole structure of a system of pure reason’ (Kant, [1785] 2005, [1788] 2012: 4). In this context, freedom is understood as freedom *from* the problems generated by defective thinking through promoting freedom *to* critically reflect on received wisdom. Hence, it is conceived that freed from traditional modes of thought, the Enlightenment’s ‘objective logic’ will facilitate both mastery of society (Hobbes) and mastery of nature (Bacon). MacIntyre criticises how this appeal to formal reasoning has seeped beyond the bounds of natural and political philosophy to influence moral reasoning and in doing so has instigated the detachment of ethical deliberation from the intersubjective frameworks of value in which it is embedded. As such, he seeks to highlight the neglected but important role played by intersubjectivity in determining the contours of moral debate. Key to this effort is emphasising the concept of a ‘tradition’. For MacIntyre, ‘A tradition is constituted by a set of practices and is a mode of understanding their importance and worth; it is the medium by which such practices are shaped and transmitted across generations’ (Mulhall and Swift, 1996: 90). In this sense, a tradition encompasses the modes of thinking, acting and evaluating in different fields of endeavour, such as aesthetics (e.g. painting, music and literature), occupations (e.g. carpentry, farming and teaching) and moral reasoning (e.g. Humanism, Catholicism and Confucianism).⁵

MacIntyre believes that the result of detaching the moral subject from the traditions that anchor moral reasoning is to generate a confusing semblance of moral deliberation without an actual commitment to values. The outcome of this process of moral individuation is the emergence of what he terms ‘emotivism’.⁶ For MacIntyre, an emotivist discourse is one where ethical language and moral reasons are advanced to justify action without recourse to tradition-informed shared understandings and commitment to the morals that are advanced. Hence, for an individualistic subject to forward moral arguments is to create an obstacle to true moral deliberation by unknowingly or wilfully seeking to manipulate others for his or her own purposes. This is because the traditions that anchor moral reasoning are not shared by the conversing individualistic subjects in an emotivist discourse. Consequently, appealing to the formality of procedure as a way to produce ‘the good’ is to confuse ‘means’ with ‘ends’ such that interlocutors engaged in ‘rational’ deliberation

become ‘means’ to each other for the fulfilment of their subjective preferences rather than co-investigators endeavouring to realise a shared conception of ‘the good’. Thus, it is not that ‘appeal’ to moral arguments concerning right and wrong or good and bad have been suspended, as it is plain that these continue to suffuse debate. Instead, what is absent is awareness that in conceiving ourselves as tradition-independent subjects, we risk eclipsing recognition of how such a conception may inadvertently transform moral deliberation into manipulative manoeuvring by dissociating terms such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ from the shared moral frameworks that give these terms a shared sense of meaning.

Given his focus on the importance of a tradition in directing moral conduct, it is unsurprising that MacIntyre’s has drawn criticism, with some accusing him of being ‘a dangerous relativist (since he offers a radically pluralist concept of moral practices)’ (Higgins, 2003: 279–280). It appears that MacIntyre does indeed conceive a relativistic approach to moral philosophy (Miller, 1994; Mosteller, 2008), although he qualifies this with the view that interrogating the contingency of the perspectives held by a tradition can help reform that tradition. In contending that there is no neutral position from which to judge the limitations of a tradition, he argues for attentiveness of one’s situated perspective when evaluating different traditions against the norms of one’s own, and in doing so, allowing such alternate traditions raise questions in one’s own tradition (Lutz, 2012: 178). Ultimately, criticisms levelled against MacIntyre as a relativist are reasoned within a tradition of ethical thought inherited from the Enlightenment where universalism and relativism are seen as the sole and polarised options. As noted by Porter (2003),

The plausibility of both relativism and perspectivism derives from the fact that both reflect the inversion of the Enlightenment ideal of a universal valid standard of rationality and truth. Since this cannot be attained (and MacIntyre agrees it cannot), the only alternative, it is said, is some form of relativism or perspectivism. (p. 46)

Others have accused MacIntyre specifically, and communitarian perspectives more broadly, as holding a static view of ‘the community’, such that the political dynamics that initiate change from within a community are overlooked by a mislaid focus on shared, rather than contested frameworks (Frazer and Lacey, 1993). This criticism assumes that MacIntyre simply eschews the politics of moral deliberation within a tradition. However, on closer inspection it becomes clear that what MacIntyre is doing is reinterpreting how change in a tradition occurs. For MacIntyre, all moral enquiries commence not in a vacuum but from within the normative commitments of a tradition of moral reasoning located in space and time. Yet, matters do not remain static. This is because those within such a tradition continually encounter ethically complex real-world situations that force reflection upon canonical moral reference points and internal contradictions such that the validity of normative frameworks may be called into question (Porter, 2003). As such, some of the standards of evaluation carried by a tradition must occasionally change if that tradition is to endure. Thus, for MacIntyre (1984), ‘A living tradition, then, is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition’ (p. 222). Taken in the context of planning, this suggests that a MacIntyrean reading of the ‘public interest’ would posit the existence of a tradition of moral reasoning on what may amount to the ‘good’ that is the

public interest (or its contemporary synonyms). Put differently, how the public interest is reasoned is both shaped by and shapes the tradition of moral reasoning that gives definition to the concept of the public interest.

For example, the tradition of reasoning on what constituted the public interest in planning was vigorously contested by Jane Jacobs and others in New York during the 1960s and helped prompt a re-evaluation of where planning's public interest lies, which in turn recalibrated the tradition of reasoning on what may count as 'good planning' (Hirt and Zahm, 2012). Importantly, this was not achieved via a process of simply finding consensus among parties through collaborative rationality (collaborative planning), nor was it accomplished through trading marginal interests in seeking to locate an agreement among a plurality of contending voices (agonistic planning). Rather, it was realised by demonstrating how certain practices prevalent at the time undermined the public interest that planning could and should aim to achieve based on common perceptions of the justification for planning's *raison d'être* as a force for the common good. This 'immanent critique' emerged from those involved in planning activity, be it as practitioners effecting change or community members affected by such change. As an internal dialectic both within and reflecting on the tradition of planning, such debate sought to explore the 'ends' that planning ought to achieve instead of assuming that such 'ends' would simply materialise as a product of proper debating procedures. Accordingly, a tradition is 'always partially constituted by an argument about the goods the pursuit of which gives to that tradition its particular point and purpose' (MacIntyre, 1984: 222).

This tradition-embedded quality of deliberation means that evaluating reasons is innately entwined with judgements on what amounts to 'the good'. In the context of planning, this implies that perceptions regarding the legitimate reasons for planning in the public interest are co-constitutive with attempts to define the public interest. This is because all judgements, including the standards for the evaluation of planning's ultimate objectives, are conducted within a tradition of reasoning. In essence, it means that reasoning the 'public interest' is an exercise in 'substantive reason'. As noted by Nicholas (2012),

Substantive reason comprises thinking about and acting on the set of standards and beliefs within a particular tradition. 'Reason' names a set of social practices that involve the asking for and giving of reasons, the evaluation of those reasons and the asking for and giving of such, and, importantly, the evaluation of the good. (p. x)

Therefore, affiliation with a tradition furnishes the conditions for a non-emotivist debate among parties who through substantive reasoning seek to determine what is choice worthy *and* what is a worthy choice. For MacIntyre, the tradition-transformative potential of such substantive reasoning is instantiated through the critically reflective perspective actors may adopt when engaged in activities they believe merit sincere commitment. MacIntyre envisages this relationship through the concept of a 'practice'.

The 'subject' of practice

In conceiving the idea of a 'practice', MacIntyre espouses the Aristotelian view that the notion of what it is right to do should be inseparable from the concept of what it is good

to be. Aristotle viewed this as constituting the 'purpose' of one's being, both in terms of what one does and whom one is. Importantly, he conceived the purpose of something or somebody to be communally established within a received yet dynamic tradition (Aristotle, 2014). MacIntyre extrapolates from this view an action-centred 'social teleology' (Lutz, 2012: 108) which he endeavours to contemporise by suggesting that the purpose of an activity is given expression through 'practice'. MacIntyre (1984) maintains that a practice is defined intersubjectively within the historically situated substantive reasoning employed by those affiliated with a tradition. As such, how a subject engages with their practice is central to understanding how the moral subject engages with their world. This is relevant to planning consequent on the enduring concern with the public interest or its synonyms as a key centring issue and justification for planning (Alexander, 2002; Campbell, 2012b; Campbell and Marshall, 2002; Fainstein, 2010; Moroni, 2004). Given the centrality of practice to the applicability of Aristotelian philosophy for modern moral conduct, and consequently for acting in the public interest (Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008), MacIntyre (1984) offers a detailed definition of what a 'practice' is:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (p. 187)

MacIntyre supplies a selection of practice examples. Among others, these include biology, architecture and the work of the historian (MacIntyre, 1984: 187). Each of these practices is characterised by a level of social cooperation in their history, current state and future development. From MacIntyre's (1988) perspective, an activity entered into primarily for 'external goods', such as monetary reward does not amount to a practice, although receiving such a reward does not disqualify an activity from being considered a practice (p. 35). Thus, MacIntyre's concept of a practice has an intrinsically 'moral-political' (Schwandt, 2005: 330) character that is principally defined by a self-referential characterisation of purpose beyond the instrumentalism pursuit of rewards other than the satisfaction of advancing practice excellence. Hence, a subject's 'motivation' is central in defining what counts as a practice.

Conway (1995) has criticised MacIntyre's concept of a self-referential practice on the basis that he 'has provided no good reason for thinking that, where people engage in certain productive activities for the sake of income or profit, those activities are precluded thereby from being instances of practice in his sense' (p. 88). Conway cites the work of the architect as an example. However, what Conway misses is that MacIntyre views practices as moral enterprises whose evaluation should not be referenced to their worth in the marketplace but rather must be judged against the standards of excellence carried by a tradition. To use Conway's own example, it is not financial gain for a subject's endeavours that matter, as it is possible to design a poorly functioning building and still receive significant financial reward. Instead, what matters is that one sincerely

commits oneself to designing a building to the best of one's ability within the context of a particular practice tradition.

At first, it may seem improbable that planning resembles the concept of a practice advanced by MacIntyre as it is frequently focused on mediating between competing issues concerning spatial governance drawn from a variety of practices rather than engaging with the internal development of practices per se. For example, planning may be more concerned with mediating between competing interests in nature conservation or the protection of historically significant architecture than with developing the science of restoration ecology or formulating new construction methods for built heritage conservation. Furthermore, it may at first appear uncertain that there are discernible 'internal goods' of planning that can be orientated relative to identifiable 'standards of excellence'. Indeed, the inherently political character of planning would seem to render doubtful that it conforms to MacIntyre's understanding of a practice as a 'coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity'. However, should planning be reconceived as the practice of arbitrating between the various competing issues that manifest in making a decision on how best to order social and social-ecological interactions in space, the idea of planning as a practice in the MacIntyrean sense begins to emerge. What is key in this context is how the activity of planning relates to the ordering of those concerns advanced by the established practices undertaken by others. Murphy provides direction here when inferring that the very activity of ordering competing demands constitutes a practice. Thus, his reply to the question as to how the activity of ordering relates to the designation of that ordering activity as a practice is that

There is a range of excellences that are necessary for answering this question well, and there is a range of capacities that are developed through successive attempts to answer these questions in common. An adequate explication of these excellences and the developed capacities, and of the worthwhile activity engaged in by those attempting to answer this question, cannot be offered except in terms of the activity itself. There are internal goods to the activity of attempting to answer questions about how the practices in a community's life are to be ordered. This activity is, therefore, a practice. (Murphy, 2003: 163)

Hence, planning may be considered a complex 'second-order' practice characterised by social cooperation wherein its goods are those of deliberation about, mediation between and the sorting of first-order practices. This ordering activity is perceived by those engaged in it as seeking to advance the public interest. The goods internal to planning are the benefits of being involved in and feeling a sense of worth that one is serving the public interest in 'trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity' (MacIntyre, 1984: 187). The standards of excellence against which this practice is evaluated are those inherited, (re) interpreted and transmitted by the tradition of reasoning about 'the good' prevailing in the historical and spatial context wherein the evaluation occurs. Importantly, this conception of planning as a 'practice' means that it may be tradition-transformative rather than merely statically repetitious. This is because planning operates in a world of 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Webber, 1973) brimful of 'inherent uncertainty, complexity and inevitable normativity' (Hartmann, 2012). The existence of such a world demands that

the subject engaged with planning is unavoidably confronted by moral considerations in determining how best to forward the public interest. This position means that judgement on how to advance the public interest cannot be inflexibly predetermined by procedure. Rather, such a subject must remain attentive to the way judgement on how best to promote the public interest may emerge through a dialogue between tradition-informed perceptions of 'the good' and the moral complexity of those contexts encountered. Accordingly, from a MacIntyrean perspective, the standards of excellence against which planning is evaluated is its coherence with the prevailing form of substantive reasoning operative within a community on how adequate planning is in handling issues of moral complexity when seeking to advance the public interest. Should certain views commonly advanced by a tradition of reasoning be shown to exhibit an internal contradiction in the context of planning activity, such a tradition must be reformed if it is to retain a justifiable force of moral influence.

For example, in returning to New York of the 1960s, Jane Jacobs and her associates were able to stimulate a reinterpretation of 'the good' carried in the substantive reasoning employed by planning. This was achieved by demonstrating that the emergence of a modernist orthodoxy in planning was inhibiting realisation of the public interest by destroying the spatial conditions and social structures needed for communities to flourish. This reasoning was used to show how such modernist perspectives were generating incoherence between the justification for planning as a practice for realising the public interest and the reasons given for 'why', 'what' and 'how' planning was been conducted. Thus, 'the subject' engaged in a practice is neither predetermined by a tradition nor fully free of one. Instead, he or she simply starts from within a tradition as a means of worldly engagement. From this position, the subject can reflect on, (re)interpret and reform the perspectives carried by that tradition should he or she identify logical inconsistencies within that tradition.

MacIntyre believes that to sincerely engage in such a self-aware and reflective activity is to seek excellence. For him, those motivations which support this excellence-directed nature of practice are 'virtues'. As he notes,

The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices ... but which will also sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good...and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good. (MacIntyre, 1984: 219)

Therefore, MacIntyre concludes that it is the subject's desire to enhance the excellence of a tradition through excellence *in* practice that both constitutes the purpose of and morally justifies a tradition-informed practice. For MacIntyre, this is the post-Aristotelian reinterpretation of virtuous moral engagement whose elision in modern liberal conceptions of the subject has resulted in the contemporary dominance of hollow emotivist discourse that implicitly prioritises 'means' over 'ends'.

Not surprisingly, such a reconceptualisation of the Aristotelian notion of a 'virtue' has drawn criticism. Martha Nussbaum (1989) in particular has accused him of longing 'to sink into the embrace of an authority ... that will give us order at the price of reason' (7 December). This charge focuses on MacIntyre's contention that the individualist subject

he sees as ubiquitous in modern society is lacking in the tradition-informed perspectives necessary to resolve social questions about morality and what is interpreted as his advocacy of a regression to an Aristotelian idea of 'virtue' as an alternative to the ascendancy of emotivism in contemporary discourse (Lutz, 2009). MacIntyre (2007) has countered this by arguing that it 'seems to result not from a misunderstanding, but from a careless misreading of the text [*After Virtue*]' (p. xi). It is in this context that Lutz (2012) defends MacIntyre by noting how 'to construct the nostalgic critique, it is necessary to conflate what MacIntyre calls the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, with the "Aristotelian virtues" or "traditional virtues," or to identify the tradition of the virtues with traditional morality' (p. 180). Thus, what MacIntyre advances is not Aristotelian virtues but rather the Aristotelian project of seeking a means to envisage what a virtue may be in the context of a society awash with emotivism discourse. To employ MacIntyre's concept of a virtuous practice in the context of planning thereby implies rethinking how the subject relates to planning's public interest.

The 'subject' of planning's public interest

From a MacIntyrean perspective, the tradition-informed and tradition-transformative understanding of worldly engagement entails that the concept of the public interest be viewed as something perceived a priori to deliberation but interpreted and reviewed by the subject through wrestling with context. Accordingly, assumptions that the public interest is something that is 'produced' a posteriori consequent on constructing adequate processes of collaboration (collaborative planning) or managing competition (agonistic planning), become untenable abstractions that extricate intersubjectivity from the traditions of moral understanding that give the activities of subjects meaning and direction. Thus, for Jane Jacobs and her associates, challenging the emerging orthodoxy of modernist planning ideas involved making judgements on what is 'good' and 'bad' planning relative to an ethical framework supplied by an intersubjectively constituted tradition. The immanent critique advanced by Jacobs was facilitated by a moral compass that provided direction when considering what 'ends' planning 'ought' to seek. Consequently, for Jacobs, determining what the public interest amounted to in the context of 1960s New York involved reflectively engaging with her understanding of the intersubjectively constituted ethical tradition carried by planning. It was this engagement that proved tradition-transformative by extending and elaborating how planning ought to conceive the public interest. Thus, to lose sight of the role played by intersubjectivity in the construction of models of consensus seeking or methods for the taming of politics is problematic for determining the public interest. This is due to how such 'constructed' modes of engagement conceive 'the subject' in planning, and as a consequence, how planning is understood as an activity.

In collaborative planning, the activity of planning is understood as that of consensus seeking around an issue of shared concern. In this model, the planner is seen as a 'facilitator' who manages the process of consensus seeking. From such a perspective, the planner brackets their own biases when endeavouring to create an 'authentic dialogue' among interlocutors so as to produce consensus on what is the common good. This model thereby requires that the planner step outside his or her ethical framework when engaged

in the activity of consensus facilitation. In effect, it asks the planner to abstain from judgement and let others decide on what amounts to the public interest. How this is possible in the daily activity of planning is somewhat problematic, as this effectively requires that planners no longer engage in the act of evaluation. However, as an activity whose *raison d'être* is delivering the public interest, planning inherently requires adjudication on how to act in the public interest. This model thereby ignores how even the choice to adopt a collaborative planning approach must first be grounded in an intersubjective tradition of substantive reasoning on how it may be possible to better determine where the public interest may lie. Attempting to somehow disengage planning in this way from the moral tradition in which it is embedded by appealing to 'universal principles of fair procedure' may undermine the very enterprise of reasoning on what constitutes the public interest. This is because eliding recognition of the contingency and intersubjectivity of the reasoning process by reference to procedures abstracted from a moral tradition may close the space for critical deliberation that attention to the role of tradition may facilitate (Foucault, 1980). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge how the place- and time-bound conception of the public interest informs the procedural actions taken in producing planning decisions that are referenced as reinstating, maintaining or advancing the public interest. This means moving beyond belief in forms of tradition-independent reasoning that implicitly advance a formal logic without acknowledging the values that foreground such forms of reasoning.

Agonistic planning models are also rendered problematic by more attentive consideration of how a subject's viewpoint is inherently intertwined with the tradition in which he or she is embedded. This is because such an agonistic approach facilitates emotivist debate by prioritising a procedure that foregrounds 'means' before 'ends' in prioritising the process of bargaining, such that the public interest is equated with cross-party support for whatever agreement is reached. However, given the preference maximising conception of the individualistic subject advanced by agonistic planning, such an agreement may simply reflect what interlocutors perceive as in their individual interests rather than something rooted in a sense of what the broader public interest may be. In keeping with the individualistic subject implied by agonistic planning, this would logically 'produce' an unambitious concept of the public interest. This is because an agreement reached (the public interest) in a world of individualistic subjects of preference maximisers would logically produce one in which interlocutors seek to secure maximum individual benefit. In this sense, divorcing the moral stance of the subject from the ethical framework of a received and (re)interpreted tradition would imply the acceptability of a 'public interest' produced as the lowest threshold that interlocutors must meet in seeking to agree on something in attempting to maximise the protection of their respective individually established interests. Hence, the individualistic subject of agonistic planning logically results in a 'race to the bottom' in seeking to reach a mutually acceptable agreement; an agreement then equated with the 'public interest'. As a consequence, the subject conceived by the agonistic planning approach results in a bleak outlook for the concept of the public interest in planning.

Resulting from identified deficiencies in both the collaborative and agonistic planning approaches, this article has argued for the need to reconsider how the public interest is conceived in planning. In doing so, it has mined the moral philosophy of Alasdair

MacIntyre in presenting a coherent framework for highlighting the importance of inter-subjectively received ethical traditions in influencing how we interpret and reinterpret what the public interest may be. In essence, this article advances the understanding that the act of planning entails 'situated ethical judgment' (Campbell, 2006) that is not simply reduceable to proper procedure. Such judgement is 'situated' in a real-time- and space-bound context and also 'situated' within a tradition of ethical deliberation that influences evaluation on what the public interest is and how it ought to be advanced. Hence, in requesting that planners suspend the ethical framework that supplies the substantive reason inherently informing how subjects perceive an issue in the act of situated ethical judgement, the collaborative planning and agonistic planning models effectively require that planners not act as planners! Instead, they imply that the planners become an ontologically impossible asocial subject.

This article argues that planning is a practice of tradition-informed reasoning on what constitutes 'the public interest' in a particular context. As such, it stresses that recognition should be given to how the practice of planning is inherently conducted in a manner infused by a tradition of thought wherein the conclusion on what the public interest entails is co-constitutive with the perceived moral legitimacy of the reasoning process employed. This article maintains that such a reflective practice would enable those involved in this reasoning process to remain aware of how their tradition of reasoning is historically situated and how they can develop a tradition-transformative practice. Hence, this 'knowing practice' (Kemmis, 2005) of reasoning the public interest would facilitate a more conscious reflection on the nature of 'the ends' that planning seeks to achieve, without recourse to the deontological and utilitarian foregrounding of a 'procedural a priori' that is, respectively, advanced by the collaborative and agonistic planning approaches. Consequently, this article seeks to complement work that endeavours to illuminate the logics structuring discussion on the value of planning, what planning should value and the role of values in planning (Campbell, 2002; Campbell and Marshall, 2006; Fainstein, 2010; Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008). Thus, this article seeks to clarify with the hope of supplying the constructive criticism necessary to assist the emergence of a more critically self-aware planning practice.

Notes

1. Some criticism of rational comprehensive planning pre-dates the mid-1970s. However, it was not until this period that acknowledging the political nature of planning gathered momentum in academia.
2. Let me state clearly at this juncture that I do not contest the enormous contribution of collaborative planning theories. Likewise, I do not seek to challenge the validity of the valuable work produced by collaborative planning theorists. What I am attempting to do here is simply to provide some clarity regarding issues of concern as they relate to conceiving the public interest in planning. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that the body of work grouped within the categories 'collaborative planning' and 'communicative planning' is diverse. This article does not seek to misrepresent such diversity. Nevertheless, a degree of simplification is necessary given space limitations and the depth of engagement required for the argument presented in this article.
3. I refer here to the universalising maxim of Kant's ([1785] 2005) 'categorical imperative'.

4. Few of these thinkers would label themselves 'communitarians'. Rather, this is a label employed by those seeking to identify and highlight shared differences between these thinkers and those who advance a modern liberal perspective in political philosophy.
5. MacIntyre is silent on the difference between 'culture' and 'tradition', but it can be surmised from his work, and is advanced in this article, that a 'tradition' has a narrower focus and definition than a 'culture'. A 'tradition' is focused on the ways of thinking, doing and evaluating within a particular field of activity (moral, political and aesthetic), while a 'culture' signifies a much broader and more amorphous amalgam of numerous traditions.
6. MacIntyre borrows but significantly reworks the meaning of this term from that originally advanced by Stevenson (1963).

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