

Fear: an underexplored motivation for planners' behaviour?

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Abstract

This paper contributes to the small but growing body of literature on the factors that influence the behavioural nature of planning practice. In this contribution we specifically focus on fear and fearfulness as emotions that can be seen as having a significant bearing on the emergence of norms of practice. Using case-study evidence from England we draw upon work in behavioural psychology to argue that in some contexts fear can become a natural reaction for planners; and that helping to create a more positive atmosphere for planning decisions – a space for hope – is something we should all consider important.

Keywords

Fear; Risk; Hope; England

Introduction

Hope, in the sense of a positive vision of the future, is perhaps essential to the profession of planning and those engaged in it. What would be the point of planning without some hope that the future was, or could be made to be, bright(er)? But what is it like to practice planning in a context such as England, where the whole activity of planning has been, since at least 1979, denigrated by politicians and blamed for problems as wide-ranging as obesity, a shortage of housing and the underperformance of the economy? In this paper we suggest that in this context, adopting a hopeful position towards the future is made increasingly difficult, with the result that rather than hope, many public sector planners in England are unconsciously motivated by fear – fear of losing control over development, fear of being blamed for unsatisfactory development, and ultimately fear of losing their jobs.

Fear and hope are examples of emotions, the role played by which is arguably a somewhat neglected field of planning theory, particularly until the recent past – it has been argued that this is because of 'some planning theorists' personal desires to "purify" planning from emotions' (Ferreira, 2013, p. 710). Whether or not this is a fair characterisation, we concur with Ferreira and others (Hoggett & Thompson, 2002; Sandercock, 2004; Tewdwr-Jones, 2002) that neglecting emotions in planning means that we miss an important explanatory factor in decision-making. There are, of course, others who have begun to tread this path (cf. Michael Gunder and Jean Hillier amongst others), and we discuss their contributions below. Wide-ranging and powerful though much of this work is, very little of it discusses fear – 'the issue of fear is still highly marginal to the main stages of theoretical development in planning theory' (Abu-Orf, 2013, p. 159); and what work there is on fear in planning perhaps unsurprisingly focuses on fear on the part of those 'being planned' rather than planners themselves (for example in this journal Tulumello, 2015).

In this paper we bring fear from the margins to the centre stage, and we look specifically at the role that it may play in the decision-making of planners. To help understand why this is important, it is worth clarifying some of the key terms we have used so far and will continue to use in this article, drawing on definitions from the field of social psychology. Firstly, why look at *emotions* in planning? Our justification is based on the effects emotions have on us as people – ‘emotions are not just “feelings” or mental states, but are accompanied by physiological and behavioral changes that are an integral part of them’ (Steimer, 2002, p. 232) – so it is reasonable to suppose that emotions may affect the behaviour of planners. What of *fear* itself? Fear has been described as a ‘primary’ emotion, i.e. one which is ‘spontaneous, fast, uncontrolled, and unintentional’ (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006, p. 369). It ‘arises in situations of threat and danger... and enables to respond to them adaptively [sic.]’ (ibid., p. 371), so is clearly important to human beings’ survival and evolution. Fear is related to, but different from, *anxiety* – anxiety has been seen as a response to less well specified or less immediate threats (Steimer, 2002). However, both fear and anxiety appear to have similar effects on people, with anxiety postulated as being a more ‘elaborate’ form of fear (ibid., p. 233). *Hope*, in contrast to fear, is described as a ‘secondary’ emotion, ‘based on cognitive appraisal of a situation’ (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006, p. 370). As relatively well-evolved beings, we might expect that humans (and specifically planners) are able to activate such secondary emotions as hope to overcome instinctive and uncontrolled primary emotions as fear. However, Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal discuss a specific case in which fear dominates hope due partly to context and partly to the way our brains function, as we will return to below. We in turn want to argue that planning in some contexts is similar, and a combination of context and human psychology can cause planners to, through fear, adopt a sharply skewed perception of risk and make decisions that are open to question.

In what follows we firstly review existing theoretical approaches that are used to understand the behaviour of planners at various scales, from individual to institutional, before drawing more deeply on literature from social psychology to discuss how and why fear might play a larger role in planning decision-making than previously discussed. We then illustrate this through a case study of planning practice in England.

Risk and loss-aversion in planning

It has been argued that writing on fear in planning tends to ‘conflate fear with risk’ (Abu-Orf, 2013, p. 159). The two are not the same, as we will go on to discuss, but this conflation means that considering risk and loss-aversion in planning is a common approach to understanding planners’ behaviour.

Some have argued that professional planning is inscribed with an inherently, and overly, risk-averse character. So pronounced is this characteristic said to be that some planning theorists have urged practitioners to plan without ‘a condom’ (Davy, 2008) or without the ‘cling film’ (Gunder, 2011, p. 207) – i.e. to embrace risk. It is of course relatively easy for theorists to say this, removed as they are from the day-to-day reality of the institutional pressures and types of decisions that practicing planners routinely take. More fundamentally, however, even if we accept this characterisation of planners in the public-sector as being risk-averse, is such risk-aversion genuinely unique to planning, or does it play a role in similar organisations?

There is an increasing body of research devoted to exploring attitudes to risk. There are, according to Borraz (2007, p. 952), three definitions of risk in the literature:

- ‘a standard definition (probability of occurrence x potential effects)...

- ...a more popular conception (the potential for negative outcomes)...
- ...an economic definition (a probability ratio)'

Over-sensitivity to risk in terms of the second of Borraz's definitions could be explained by the *social amplification of risk* theory, which suggests that '...risk and risk events interact with psychological, social, institutional, and cultural processes in ways that amplify or attenuate risk perceptions and concerns' (Pidgeon et al., 2003, p. 2). So planners might, talking with each other and/or other interested parties, develop a skewed perception of the risks consequent upon their actions. It has been suggested that we now live in a 'risk society', where conditions of 'advanced modernity' (Beck, 1992) mean we have a fundamentally different conception of and approach to risk than in the past. Management theorists have posited a number of ways in which this risk is dealt with by governance institutions and populations as a whole. Power (1997, p. 141) writes of an 'audit society', which responds to risk by 'greater investment in formal, generalizable systems of control rather than by developing non-standard capabilities for acting on informal sources of intelligence'.

Insights from behavioural economics on decision making under uncertainty, particularly in relation to the distinction between intuitive choices and those predicated on rational cognition, can help provide further insights into planners' behaviour. It is now well-established that the time horizon under which a decision has to be made is highly significant in explaining whether the decision maker employs instinct or reason (Kahnemann & Tversky, 1979) with corresponding implications for how a decision maker views risk: the longer one has to contemplate a decision the more likely one is to be risk-averse (Kahnemann, 2011; Kahnemann & Tversky, 1979). By extension, under circumstances where rationality is more important in arriving at a decision the prevailing context assumes a highly significant position as a point of reference against which projections on reality might be based. In the language of behavioural economics this idea that choices are 'reference dependent' casts decision making as a calculus of prospects with the range of likely potential outcomes valued against some reference point – typically the status quo. The value of the status quo in turn is highly sensitive to the duration over which we have to reflect on our decision, particularly as guaranteed losses are often more highly valued by a decision maker with time to contemplate than more hypothetical opportunity costs. So, 'the disadvantages of the alternatives loom larger than their advantages' (Kahnemann, 2003, p. 1457).

This articulation of the circumstances that might make one inherently predisposed towards favouring the status quo suggests that the characterisation of planners as unusually risk averse may be unfair. From this perspective reading risk aversion off as a feature of professional personality type is an error stemming from thinking about the decisions taken in isolation from the circumstances that define the decision making environment – what Hood et al. (2001, p. viii) called 'risk regulation regimes... combinations of multiple institutions, rules, practices and animating ideas'. The kinds of choices planners are confronted with on a daily basis have a long time horizon and potential payoffs that are often uncertain and/or hypothetical. These features make a decision in favour of the status quo systemically more likely. If we add to this set of factors the pressure brought to bear by residents' groups and others against development (Sturzaker, 2011) it is hardly surprising that planners often choose the certainty of the present. Further, Hood et al. (2001, p. 176) found that 'Much of the administrative architecture and dynamics of the risk regulation regimes we observed seemed to stem from institutional imperatives to avoid blame and liability'. These issues of blame are explored further in another book by Hood (2011, p. 12), who identifies 'a persistent logic of defensive behaviour to avoid blame in government and public services'. This defensive behaviour, he argues, emerges from a negativity bias amongst the public and commentators, with

failures receiving more attention than successes, and a consequent 'mediocrity bias' amongst public servants.

If this is done consciously, then there may be incentives that could be brought to bear to attempt to change the behaviour of decision-makers, including planners. If, however, these decisions are in fact made (or self-justified) largely unconsciously, as argued by Howell Baum (1987), then the picture becomes dramatically more complex. Baum focused on planners employed in 'bureaucracies', and the role of the latter, taking an explicitly psychoanalytical approach with four underpinning assumptions, including, critically, that 'people tend to think consciously about matters that are easy, comfortable, pleasant. Anything that is somehow unpleasant... they push out of awareness and continue to think about covertly, unconsciously' (Baum, 1987, p. 6). One of the consequences of the power of unconscious thought in bureaucracies (such as public sector planning organisations) is that 'in efforts to defend themselves against shame, workers [in our case planners] may avoid taking initiative, attempt to confuse others about their responsibilities, ritualistically recite rules, and even doubt their own competence to act' (Baum, 1987, p. 5).

This relates back to the risk avoidance literature, with Hood (2011, p. 12) identifying 'a persistent logic of defensive behaviour to avoid blame in government and public services'. Hood identifies a number of strategies to avoid or deflect blame, including 'Protocolization... stick to the rules' and 'Herding... stay with the group'. Some have found evidence of planners behaving in this way (Gunn & Hillier, 2012; Hillier, 2002) with Gunder (2011; 2014) going further and suggesting that planners 'go along with an "impossible" fantasy' (2014, p. 8) in the form of unachievable plans, in order to both fit in with their colleagues and ensure they do not incur the ire of their employers.

This may in some cases be true, but for us the key contribution of Baum's psychoanalytical approach is to move beyond the easy tendency to criticise public servants, including planners, for being in a state of 'narrow defensiveness [which] puts the blame avoiding interests of providers and producers ahead of the welfare of those they ostensibly serve' (Hood, 2011, p. 177). Characterising decision-making as in some sense indicative of character defects in the planning profession is too simple a view, an unfair characterisation and fall into the trap of privileging 'methodological individualisms' (Jepperson & Meyer, 2011), neglecting the socio-institutional context within which individual planners make decisions.

One reason planners may seem reluctant to embrace risk can be seen as a result of the type of decisions they are required to make in the normal discharge of their professional duties. As Cullen and Knox (1981, p. 149) put it, 'whereas doctors may bury their mistakes and lawyers hang theirs, the outcome of planners' activities are less easily disposed of'. Baum goes to some lengths to emphasise that the planners he surveys 'are exceptionally well educated; emotionally, they are normal' (Baum, 1987, p. 167). We would probably not use language such as 'normal' to describe people's emotional state today, but the broader point is that the choices that planners make may well be the same ones that the vast majority of us would make if we were placed in the same situation. To explore in more depth why, we need to consider other explanatory theories.

Fear and hope in planning

It now seems fairly well established that 'risk preferences in aggregate tend to be asymmetric in human decision making... [so] potential losses are commonly weighted more heavily than equivalent gains' (Hood, 2011, p. 9). In the preceding section we reviewed work from Baum, amongst others, exploring the implications of this, and the shame/blame avoidance tendency it can

lead to. In this section we want to go further into what, for planners, is largely unexplored territory – behavioural and social psychology. These fields, along with other contributions, can help us to understand more about the unconscious parts of the decision-making process, and the different ways that different emotions operate, which in turn might help elucidate why some planners act in the way they do. Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006), writing in the field of social psychology, use the case study of Jewish Israeli society to argue that fear can tend to outweigh hope in both individuals and societies, and whilst we are not facile enough to suggest that the 'intractable conflict' (p. 380) which that society is immersed in on a daily basis is comparable to the workaday lives of planners, we do propose that the fear-hope dichotomy discussed by Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal might provide us with a new way to conceptualise planning decision making.

Fear arises as a response to threat or danger, sometimes conscious and sometimes not so: 'it is possible to differentiate between two mechanisms of fear arousal: one via conscious appraisal and the other, primary fear, via automatic and unconscious reactions... The former is based on perception and evaluation of a situation as threatening and dangerous. The latter are based on either unconditioned or conditioned stimulus-reaction relations' (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006, p. 371). Although natural and essential to our survival both as a species and as individuals, fear 'can become pathological and interfere with the ability to cope successfully with various challenges and/or stressful events' (Steimer, 2002, p. 234).

Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal (2006: 372) explore how this happens:

Fear... prioritizes information about potential threats... It tends to cause adherence to known situations and avoidance of risky, uncertain, and novel ones; it tends to cause cognitive freezing, which reduces openness to new ideas, and resistance to change.

Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal contrast fear with hope. The descriptions of hope they use share a great deal with how we might describe 'good' planning (p. 373):

Hope... is based on higher cognitive processing, requiring mental representations of positively valued abstract future situations and more specifically, it requires setting goals, planning how to achieve them, use of imagery, creativity, cognitive flexibility, mental exploration of novel situations, and even risk taking...

The similarities here with the urging of planners to remove their condoms/cling film (see above) are striking. Some have argued that 'hope matters because it discloses the creation of potentiality or possibility' (Anderson, 2006, p. 733). Similarly, others have written about the importance of 'spaces of hope' and 'alternative visions' for planning (Harvey, 2000, p. 195). Why, then, in planning and elsewhere, does hope not triumph over fear? We, as humans, pride ourselves on our ability to use the 'higher cognitive processing' Jarymowicz and Bar-Tal refer to. As noted above, they use the case study of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to argue that fear is a more powerful emotion than hope, because (p. 374):

Fear is activated automatically, without effort and cognitive control, hope always relies on thinking and requires various intellectual skills. On the behavioral level, fear may lead to defensive and/or aggressive behaviors, often already used in the past... while hope requires conceiving new behaviors to achieve the desired, positively valued goal and attempts to realize it... As a result, fear has a more

direct influence on behavior and once activated, it has a strong effect on thinking. In general, its dominance often reduces the probability that hope will be activated

Fear can thus dominate hope both in terms of the individual decisions that people make, and how collective emotions (or affects) can develop: 'Fear and hope can each become a collective emotional orientation, and as such organize society's views and direct its actions. Societies involved in intractable conflict are dominated by a collective fear orientation' (Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006, p. 367). Whilst, as we stress above, we do not wish to seem glib in drawing parallels between the political situation in Palestine-Israel and the prosaic world of planning practice, this understanding of how fear dominates hope might be useful. The risk theory discussed above includes the concept of the 'social amplification of risk' (Pidgeon et al., 2003, p. 2), and similarly fear could become 'amplified' within groups. This might also suggest that attempts to address fear need to focus at levels other than the individual. It is not uncommon to 'take individuals to be the source of change; but what if people are better understood as the carriers of practice?... [change is then] at heart a matter of reconfiguring the practices of which society is made' (Shove et al., 2012, p. 137). When we talk about planning practice, then, we should perhaps do so in the sense of a *social* practice, with all the complexities inherent within such. Bringing together these ideas with the discussion above regarding the 'audit society' and the need to avoid blame, an argument can be made that within such a society (for example a planning office, or indeed the wider planning profession), fear or anxiety about making the "wrong" decision could easily develop into a powerful driver of behaviour.

As noted above, there is some work which links fear to planning. Often, however, this work focuses on those 'being planned', i.e. the residents of urban areas, not on planners themselves. Where planners are referred to in this work, it can be in the sense once again of blaming them for the problems that have arisen: 'The planning served not as a mediator but as a conflict producer' (Jabareen, 2006, p. 317); albeit not necessarily for actions they have undertaken deliberately: 'urban fear can be an unintended effect of the more well-meaning intentions' (Tulumello, 2015, p. 15). This could, then, be seen as part of the 'character assassination' of planners we discuss above, and possibly contribute to the tendency of planners to try to avoid blame, as noted by Baum (1987). Notwithstanding this, some of the existing work in this area discusses fear at the societal or community level, helping to understand issues such as gated communities, and a reluctance by some groups to go to some parts of some cities: 'fear can produce spaces marked by exclusion in ordinary cities' (Tulumello, 2015, p. 15). Indeed, one paper identifies a 'culture of fear' amongst the residents of urban areas (Abu-Orf, 2013, p. 166).

In a similar way, we could interpret extreme risk-aversion on the part of planners as being one characteristic of a culture of fear within planning. Some have described behaviour which might illustrate this point. In a study of planners in Western Australia, Hillier found evidence of what she called 'Chameleon-like behaviour' amongst planners – "'sucking your breath in" or "just keeping quiet"... flexibility... ducking for cover when required' (2002, p. 198). More recently, in work with Zan Gunn discussing the 2001-2010 reforms of the English planning system, she identified repeated evidence of planners tending to '*retreat* to the "safety" of rules and processes' – similarly, local planning authorities '*became* risk averse' (both quotes Gunn & Hillier, 2012, p. 371, emphasis added). We tentatively go further, suggesting that planners might not *become* risk averse, or *retreat* to safety, but instead, given the discussion in this section, *default automatically* to behaviour such as 'ducking for cover', given the context they work within, where there is little to incentivise risky behaviour and a great deal to de-incentivise it.

In the next, penultimate, section we discuss one example from planning practice in a specific niche of the discipline – public sector planning in England. This type of narrow focus clearly runs the risk of reducing comparability, but it is now well established that the socio-institutional context within which individual planners make decisions is of central importance (Hillier & Healey, 2008). So analysis of behaviour in specific contexts is necessary, whilst recognising that the case may not be representative. However, based on our wide experience and conversations with planners in different parts of England, the case does appear to reflect prevailing behavioural trends that go beyond rational risk aversion into fear.

Fear in English planning practice

As noted in Lord et al. (2017), planning around the world has in recent years been criticised by academics for a number of reasons, but perhaps most fiercely on the grounds that it is 'the ideology of contemporary neoliberal space' (Gunder, 2010, p. 308), with planners perhaps seen as the foot soldiers of the neoliberal orthodoxy. Planners in England have not escaped this criticism (Allmendinger & Houghton, 2012), but it is worth reflecting on the sustained attack that planners (and planning) have come under in England – Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014, p. 345) describe 'a sustained programme of neoliberalization to which urban and environmental planning has been subjected in England over a period spanning approximately the last 15 years' via a series of legislative changes, often accompanied by rhetoric criticising planning for delaying/preventing development.

These legislative changes continue, with one example published in July 2015 by the UK Treasury (not, it should be noted, the Government department responsible for planning in England). This 'Productivity Plan' stated that England's 'excessively strict planning system' is responsible for the fact that 'The UK has been incapable of building enough homes to keep up with growing demand' (HM Treasury, 2015, p. 43). This comment is clearly focussed on the planning *system*, not planners themselves, but senior politicians in the UK have been happy to explicitly criticise the latter, particularly those working in the public sector. The Prime Minister of the time referred to planners as one of a number of 'enemies of enterprise', specifying that he meant 'The town hall officials who take for ever with those planning decisions that can be make or break for a business.' (Watt, 2011). Likewise the minister responsible for planning said that local authority planning departments were 'a cross between the "last bastion of communism and sheer bloody mindedness"' (Birmingham Post.net, 2010). So planners are simultaneously criticised for being too neoliberal (by academics) and not neoliberal enough (by politicians). Meanwhile, articles in the press blame planners for causing, *inter alia*, obesity (Cooper, 2014), alcohol abuse (Donnelly, 2009) and burglary (Huddersfield Examiner, 2003).

Whilst the political 'solution' to perceived problems with planning/planners tends to be the legislative changes noted above, the academic counterpoint has been to focus on the character or personality of planners themselves, understood to be introverted individuals who need to 'get out more' (Morphet et al., 2007, p. 46). The character assassination has been completed by those for whom the status and relevance of planning is imperilled by the character of those that people its professional ranks to the degree that a programme of 'culture change' (Shaw & Lord, 2007) has been said to be necessary. In this context of criticism from all sides, it could be argued that the space for public sector planners in England to re-imagine an outward-looking role for themselves has been significantly circumscribed. We now use the insights of behavioural and social psychology to explore the outcomes that can follow from such a limitation of 'opportunity space' (Frank, 2012).

The case we wish to discuss arises from our experiences leading a group of students on our regular field trips associated with a 'rural planning' course. For several consecutive years we have visited, in the company of planners from the local authority, a partially redeveloped industrial site on the outskirts of a small village in an area of high environmental quality, with corresponding strong protection under English planning law. Each year, a helpful and friendly planning officer whose day-to-day job deals with planning applications for specific projects takes us to the site and sets the scene for the students. He explains that planning permission for a mixed scheme of housing and light industrial uses was given in 2002, following lengthy and complicated negotiations with the applicant. One of the reasons for giving permission was that the site included a complex of buildings designated as a *Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)*. SAMs are buildings or sites in England of particular archaeological value, and are very well protected under English planning law. The SAM in question at this site was at risk of collapse due to lack of maintenance, and a condition of the planning permission was that it would be safeguarded before the new buildings were occupied.

Building began quite quickly, but after the development was approximately 80% completed, building work stopped as the developers, in the planner's words, 'ran out of money'. The site was subsequently repossessed by the bank who had invested in the scheme. The site has been held in an impasse for a number of years (we have visited it in this partly completed state for each of the last five years), with the resulting degradation in quality of the partly built houses.

This impasse is due to a conflict between the bank and the local authority. The bank is unwilling to finance the completion of the development without the prior removal of a legal covenant attached to the planning permission. This covenant limits the occupation of the houses on the site to individuals or families with a local connection, a not uncommon restriction in rural England. The owners wish to see this legal covenant removed, as they claim it is financially unviable to complete the development with it in place. For some time the local authority has been resisting these proposals as being in conflict with their policies of limiting the type of development which they accept on such sites – with unrestricted housing being considered unacceptable given the shortage of affordable homes for local people in this area (again, this is relatively common in rural England - see Sturzaker, 2010 for a discussion about some of the political issues around this type of development). The planning officer tells our students, however, that this policy conflict, whilst important, is not the principle driver for his resistance. Rather, he is worried about the potential for owners of other sites which are similarly constrained by legal agreements making the same argument, because of the so-called 'precedent' which would be set, despite this being an almost unique set of circumstances in this particular local authority – indeed we have not heard of a similar example anywhere in England in recent years. We have however frequently heard a fear of precedent cited in planning committees as a reason for refusing to grant planning permission, and a (highly unscientific!) 'Google' search on 'planning precedent fear' reveals numerous local newspaper stories from around England making similar statements (Herbert, 2013; Mid Devon Gazette, 2012; Pettitt, 2011; The Star, 2013). The so-called 'precedent' argument is that if a local authority grants planning permission for a development of a particular type or in a particular location, they would be obliged to subsequently grant planning permission for similar developments in other places within their administrative purview. This is all despite advice from the Planning Inspectorate (the quasi-independent branch of the UK Government which decides appeals against such refusals) that 'in reality the precedent argument is very rarely persuasive or conclusive as each case will differ in its circumstances from others and must be considered on its merits' (The Planning Inspectorate, 2011, p. 1). Still, in this case and others, we can see fear of precedent, and hence losing control of development, influencing the actions of planners like the one our students speak to, with the result in this case that a prominent site in a village of high

landscape value features an unsightly and deteriorating building site, and of course encapsulates a large quantity of resources.

It is at this point that we come back to the context within which this example of planning behaviour occurs. It is possible to argue that the planners involved have behaved in a perfectly rational way, particularly in the context of the blame-avoidance culture, and the fact that planners 'may wish to have power over the implementation of solutions, but may expect others will get any credit, while planners will be blamed for failures' (Baum, 1987, p. 156). In this context it is unsurprising that planners would be acutely risk-averse, and could be argued to be behaving entirely rationally in taking such a stance. However, we argue that this has, in some cases, developed into irrational fear – whether of 'the Other', in the form of developers, and/or fear of being blamed for unsatisfactory outcomes of the planning process. On a rational analysis, there appears only to be a slight risk of substantial negative effects outweighing the benefits of development, which include making the SAM safe and cleaning up what a local politician has described as 'an eyesore' (Tim Farron MP, 2012). But the fear of something more profound appears to be at play. As Baum (1987, p. 10) observed: 'Defensiveness is appropriate in the face of real adversaries... However, in any particular case one should ask what are the actual probable threats? While defending oneself against harm may be appropriate, a realistic appraisal of the pending threat is necessary for mounting a realistic defence'. If planners in England are fearful, partly as a result of the socio-political context they operate in, then this realistic appraisal of threat is harder to achieve because, as others have noted, fear overrides hope. In the concluding section we reflect upon the implications for planning theory and practice of this argument.

Conclusion – can planners move from fear to hope?

In this paper we have sought to add to the developing field of planning scholarship that acknowledges the importance of emotions as an explanatory factor in decision making. We have reviewed theories of risk aversion from the perspectives of social psychology, management and behavioural economics and have argued that these theories may be insufficient to explain why some planners behave as they do. We have then drawn further upon theory from psychology to suggest that *fear* may be motivating planners' behaviour. We have discussed an example of planning practice in England to illustrate our claims.

In discussing that case, we do not seek to ascribe blame for the situation to any quarter – clearly, the situation as described benefits nobody, and was arrived at due to a complex combination of factors. It is worth reporting that at the time of writing, in early 2017, it seems a solution has been found – a planning application to convert the various buildings on site into 53 dwellings, five of them 'affordable', was approved by the local planning authority in mid-2016. So, the end result is more or less what was requested by the owners of the site (still the bank that repossessed it from the original development company) 10 years ago. In his report to the planning committee, the planner who has been so open with us and our students noted that the proposal effectively represented the least worst option for the site – there was a deviation from policy, but it seemed to be the smallest deviation possible; and the risk of 'precedent' (see above) was small due to the circumstances of the site. It seems fair to say there is no ideal solution to the problems raised by the site – it might qualify as a 'wicked problem' (Rittel & Webber, 1973), with the planner faced with unpalatable options both left and right. However, since encountering this site we have felt the option chosen in the end was the right, indeed, only one – and what is most curious is that it has taken 10 years for the planning authority to come to the same conclusion. We argue that this delay is due to the planner in this case, who stands as exemplar for many of his colleagues, was so fearful of unlikely

negative outcomes that he felt unable to make this decision sooner. As noted above, this is just one case, albeit one which we feel is reflective of the broader sector of the discipline. There is clearly a need for a wider study in this area, perhaps as one of the reviewers of this paper suggested along the lines of the celebrated survey of planners' ethical positions undertaken by Howe and Kaufman (1980). If such a study found wider evidence of fear, then what might be done about it?

There are no easy answers for addressing fear and defensiveness amongst planners – beyond an exhortation for planning practitioners to be less 'negative' in their work (Davy, 2008; Gunder, 2011). However, as also noted here the institutional setting within which public sector planning takes place in many contexts, and particularly in England, allied to the irreversible and long-term nature of the decisions with which planning deals makes a highly cautious professional disposition unsurprising. Sandercock urges planners to take more risks – 'for planners, the essence of risk-taking is learning to surrender the obsession with control and certainty...' (2003, p. 216). This is far from easy when operating in a climate which we have argued is so conducive to fear and anxiety, and where blame is ascribed to planners for many problems, sometimes legitimately so but sometimes unreasonably stretching the bounds of culpability. Uncovering the 'unknown, uncertain and unspoken' is the business of research. From this perspective there is clearly a need for a great deal more work that reflects on the context within which planning practitioners work – for example, in a societal context where a negative bias is ingrained what incentives are there for planners to be more positive and less defensive? If an audit society (Power, 1997) operates in English local government and 'it seems to pay better to be average than to be excellent' (Hood, 2011, p. 12), why would we expect planners to take risks or to embrace hope over fear? In our experience, planning in the public sector is often a thankless task, particularly in the political climate discussed above. This sort of rhetorical assault is presumably intended to try to alter planners' behaviour, but it seems more likely to entrench the sort of defensiveness and fear outlined in this paper. Conversations we have with practitioners on a regular basis reveal a widespread and entrenched sense of disillusionment.

So how can we move forward? We opened this article by stating that hope for a better future was essential for planning. It was certainly central to the disciplinary and professional genesis of planning (cf. Howard, 1898), and remains at the heart of much normative planning theory (for example Healey, 2006). But it seems that in some contexts the room for planners to be hopeful is hard to find. Perhaps we need to look for room for what David Harvey (2000) calls 'Spaces of Hope', where planners – and, of course the wider society of which they form part, can look for new ways to overcome their fear. We could look to examples from other spheres of life for such spaces. Anderson (2014, p. 17) asks of the American context, 'How do collective affects such as 'Obama hope' infuse, resonate with and become part of the institutions, practices and other things that make up society? How do collective affects condition social life, setting limits or exerting pressure on what is thinkable and doable?'. Of course, 'Obama hope' is itself an example of a transient affect – the now ex-President telling an interviewer that his famous campaign slogan should perhaps have been "'Yes we can, but...'" (Channel 4 News, 2010). So this is not straightforward, and should also be an area of future research.

We can for now at least conclude by returning to another point we made in the introduction – that paying attention to emotions within planning is essential – 'if the role of emotions in planning is not acknowledged, it does not mean that emotions played no role; rather, it means that the role that emotions played will remain unknown, uncertain and unspoken' (Antonio Ferreira, 2013, pp. 712-713); or, in the words of Howell Baum (1987, p. 5) 'ignoring unconscious anxieties does not drive them away, it only keeps them underground, where they form thickets that trap the unprepared'.

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