Article:

Exploring Planning as a Technology of Hope

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Abstract

Following Baum's proposition that planning be understood as "the organization of hope," there has been limited scholarly engagement with what might be involved in fostering hope through planning practices. Reflecting on three years of participatory action learning and research on a deprived housing estate in Sheffield in Northern England, we explore core challenges raised by appealing to hope as an objective of community-led planning. Overall, we argue for further work to explore how the organizational technologies of planning relate to core dimensions of hope, including the ways in which unevenly developed capacities to aspire shape diverse modes of hoping.

Keywords

community planning, capacity to aspire, hope

Introduction

For decades, the progressive promises once associated with urban planning have been subject to a prolonged process of disenchantment (Healey 2012). Declining faith in planning has been linked to the deeper undermining of belief in progress and a related "felt loss of a future" (Williams 1989, 103). In response, "hope" has become a keyword for critical social and political thinking, frequently appealed to as an antidote to despair that a world dominated by capitalist realism cannot be made substantially more just, democratic, or environmentally sustainable (e.g., Appadurai 2013; Solnit 2016).

The powerful proposition that planning might be understood as "the organization of hope" (Baum 1997)[1], like Reardon's (2008, 537) assertion that ". . . fundamentally we're in the hope business," implies an important connection between the purposes of planning and hope, suggesting it might represent a route to "re-enchant" the planning project in the twenty-first century (Healey 2010, 2012). However, beyond Baum's (1997) foundational contribution on the challenges of shaping "communities of hope," there has been little engagement in the planning literature with wider scholarship on hope or how it might be fostered through planning practices. This paper seeks to address this gap by further exploring the relationship between planning and hope, and some of the issues involved in making it an objective for planning.

We begin by illustrating both the appeal *of* hope for planning theory and some of the core challenges raised by appealing *to* hope as a principle for planning.[2] Using this as an analytical framework, we then reflect on three years of participatory action learning and research work. This sought to cultivate hope for a better future on a deprived housing estate in Sheffield in Northern England, amid an austerity agenda that has reconfigured the role of the local state.

Overall, although our experiences illustrate that hope offers no easy path to re-enchant the planning project, we argue that it can orient critical analytical and practical attention toward important facets of planning work that remain underexamined. The paper, therefore, makes three key contributions. First, we highlight a need for planning scholarship and practice to more explicitly address the relationship between planning and hope and suggest this might be done by exploring multiple dimensions of hope to understand the different *modes* through which these find expression in community-oriented planning. Second, we point to the importance of understanding "the organization of hope" as a paradox, capturing important tensions between planning's organizational technologies and the malleable, contested modes through which hope comes to be experienced in peoples' everyday lives. Third, we argue that planning scholarship should pay further attention to what Arjun Appadurai (2013) calls the "capacity to aspire" as a crucial but frequently overlooked foundation of the politics of hope in community planning.

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Toward a Definition of Hope

Hope is intangible, elusive, and therefore hard to define. In everyday usage, the term is applied in a bewildering variety of contexts. For present purposes, it can be provisionally conceived as a complex and changeable mixture of desire and reasoned expectation (Eagleton 2017). This formulation, while simplifying, clarifies some of the central dimensions involved in thinking about hope.

First, it points to hope's temporal structure: its orientation to what has not-yet become (Bloch 1986). Hope requires an "openness to the future with the possibility of agency" (Billias 2010, 23), enabling people to link desires for what is lacking in the present to expectations about their potential future realization.

Second, it captures hope's distinctive coupling of emotion and reason. Desire for what is yet-to-be is necessarily linked to a range of affective states and emotions (anxiety, eagerness, excitement) (e.g., Anderson 2006). However, hopes are also tempered by assessments of what is possible and can reasonably be expected of a situation (Eagleton 2017).

Drawing on affect theory, which sees emotions not just as psychological dispositions but as a force that "mediate[s] the relationship between the psychic and the social, and between the individual and the collective" (Ahmed 2004, 119), Anderson (2006, 742) argues that hope is always more than "an intentional act directed towards the future, in which it is only the content of that which is hoped for that is 'socially constructed'." Instead, he points to the ways in which hope "takes place," a fragile and ephemeral relation with not-yet-become possibilities, sometimes enabling people to keep going within wider "affective atmospheres" characterized by pessimism.

Third, understanding hope as expectant points toward a constitutive level of uncertainty. Because we cannot know if our expectations will be met, hoping requires an investment of faith. For Rebecca Solnit (2016), "[h]ope is an embrace of the unknown and the unknowable, an alternative to the certainty of both optimists and pessimists." As such, hope is frequently seen as a virtue to be cultivated alongside qualities such as courage and patience that enable human agency in the face of doubt and potential disappointment. In its most radical variants, hope is celebrated as an open-ended act of faith "in the teeth of will and knowledge" (Marcel in Eagleton 2017, 62; Lear 2010).

Fourth, while hope has largely positive connotations, the forms it takes remain mutable. Desires and expectations are shaped by peoples' diverse responses to the contexts in which they find themselves. As a result, there are different ways of being hopeful that mean different things to people at different times:

> Our hopes may be active or passive, patient or critical, private or collective, grounded in the evidence or resolute in spite of it, socially conservative or socially transformative.

> We all hope, but we experience this most human of all mental feelings in a variety of modes. (Webb 2007, 80)

These different "modes of hoping" have distinctive temporalities, give rise to diverse commitments, dispositions, and characteristic ways of acting that may coincide, conflict, or be contested. The inescapable need to distinguish between genuine and false hopes introduces a dimension of ethical and political judgment to questions of hope (Zournazi 2002). In the next section, we relate these dimensions of hope to planning.

Planning and Its Modes of Hoping

Drawing on the definition above, in this section of the paper, we build on Baum's (1997) exploration of planning as the "organization of hope" by examining the appeal *of* hope for planning scholarship and some key issues raised by appealing *to* hope as an object of community planning efforts. This establishes an analytical framework for further exploring the relationship between hope and planning in the rest of the paper.

Hope and the Future Orientation of Planning

Like hope, planning involves "An orientation to the future and a belief that action now can shape future potentialities" (Healey 2010, 19). Thus, a parallel exists between the basic temporal coordinates of planning and those of hope. Healey's requirement for *belief* in the possibilities of future-shaping action also implies that planning may require some investment of hope in the face of an uncertain future.

However, if planning can be understood as a governmental technology concerned with "the possibilities that time offers space" (Abram 2014, 129), surprisingly little attention has been devoted to its temporal dimensions (e.g., Abram 2014; Degen 2018) or the challenges involved in engaging with the future (Baum 1999; Connell 2009).

Plans seek to tell authoritative and persuasive stories about the future (Throgmorton 2003) sometimes by erasing inconvenient aspects of the past (Abram 2014). But people's everyday lives are often rooted in alternative narratives that connect the pasts and presents of places, producing distinctive relations to future potentialities (Baum 1997; Lombard 2013) that may require careful, patient exploration (Erfan 2017). Planning, therefore, requires attentiveness to a "politics of space-time," composed of various vectors of change, the temporalities involved in their unfolding, and interaction with a wide range of promises, aspirations, and hopes (Raco, Henderson, and Bowlby 2008, 2652). Pace and control over time are important and contested aspects of this politics. In this regard, time is a resource through which power is enacted but might also be disrupted, reworked, or resisted in ways that can profoundly shape how hope is understood and takes place (Degen 2017).

Orientations toward the future are also diverse and multifaceted, not least because society affords different people different opportunities to form and realize aspirations[3] (Appadurai 2013). Writing in a public health context, Warin et al. (2015) develop the concept of *short horizons* to articulate disjunctures between the taken-for-granted futures of public health interventions and the everyday temporalities of people whose experience of time and the future is limited by the weight of the past and an indigent present. Proximity to necessity shapes people's orientations toward the future and their characteristic modes of hoping. Unsurprisingly, their enthusiasm for engaging with future-oriented planning processes may be constrained, yet planners and planning theory rarely consider "how time is experienced differently by individuals and groups in different contexts" (Livingstone and Matthews 2017, 33).

The idea of planning as "the organization of hope" (Baum 1997) has been principally associated with efforts to reimagine planning practice as a form of communicative action, exploring how planners can empower people to shape change on their own terms. Communicative and community-led approaches seek to distance planning from the bureaucratic-technical modes of working associated with state-led planning and the production of formal futures (Degen 2018), normatively redeploying planning as a participatory technology for organizing hope. This involves "help[ing] a community experience itself in time" (Baum 1999), pointing to the importance of cultivating sensitivity to the multiple temporalities involved in planning processes, out of which particular future possibilities, and attendant modes of hoping, are shaped.

Reason and Emotion in Planning

As Appadurai (2013, 286–87) suggests, "the future is not just a technical or neutral space, but is shot through with affect and with sensation." However, in claiming specialist knowledge of the future, planners traditionally privilege particular forms of scientific rationality, leading to charges that "the planning profession works, collectively, in a state of arrested emotional development, bracketing the realm of the emotions as being unmanageable, ungovernable, downright dangerous" (Sandercock and Lyssiotis 2003, 163). Bolstered by wider interest in affect and emotion across the social sciences, a principle contribution of scholars associated with the organization of hope has arguably been to begin putting planning in touch with its emotions (Baum 2015).

Understanding *hope* as reasoned desire suggests the possibility of holding rationality and emotion together in planning scholarship. Many of the physical *things* that concern planning (whether buildings, roads, community facilities, etc.) may be tangible and subject to various forms of reasoned calculation. Yet people's embodied senses of place and the meanings attached to those things are tangled up with the intangible stuff of individual feelings and collective moods

that can fundamentally transform how they are understood. Organizing hope, therefore, challenges planning to develop ways of acting on *both* the reasoned and more affective registers through which possibilities for change are apprehended.

Planning and Hope in the Face of Uncertainty

Explanatory social science seeks to establish facts and has traditionally been skeptical of the religious and affective associations of hope (Webb 2007). Postwar optimism around planning rested on claims to scientific knowledge of how to create better futures. Planners had little incentive to admit reliance on the vicissitudes of hope. Subsequent acknowledgment of the limitations of those claims has necessitated greater humility and an acceptance of the uncertainty, contestability, and fallibility inherent in attempts to guide the future. These developments have generated *theoretical* acceptance that people should be involved in decisions that affect their lives, opening the door for hope to be considered an important part of planning.

Recent academic interest in hope, however, is also linked to dissatisfaction with the seeming inability of critical scholarship to move beyond deconstructing what already exists, to explore positive human qualities and responses to suffering and injustice (Webb 2007). Appadurai (2013) argues progressive social scientific scholarship has paid inadequate attention to the positive, future-shaping energies, desires, and visions of the good life generated in all cultures. Drawing on the everyday experiences of the urban poor in the Global South and the slow, patient forms through which they mobilize to improve their lives, he calls for research to "map aspiration" as a means of understanding how the "capacity to aspire," "a social and collective capacity without which words such as 'empowerment', 'voice' and 'participation' cannot be meaningful" (289), is cultivated, defined, and might be expanded as part of a politics of hope.

The "capacity to aspire" maps onto planning theory's long-standing concern with the evaluative and normative bridges through which knowledge is linked to understanding of future possibilities (Forester 2015). Explorations of hope and aspiration may offer a productive route for deepening understanding of the problematic relationship between *is* and *ought* that characterizes planning as a social practice (Campbell 2012). As we will argue below, focusing attention on the capacity to aspire as a dimension of community planning has the potential to expand and deepen approaches to asset-based community development that have become influential in the Global North and that look to build community capacity by focusing on the positive resources people have at their disposal (Haines 2014).

Planning as a Mode of Organizing Hope

If hope is a virtue that can be cultivated but that can also take multiple forms, entailing different temporalities, ways of

balancing reason and emotion, and coping with uncertainty, it is important to understand the modes of hoping that planning as a set of organizational technologies might be more and less oriented to recognize and cultivate. Planning efforts may benefit from the presence of more radical modes of hoping that are open-ended and stand firm in the face of evidence (i.e., hoping for the best in unpromising circumstances). However, plans themselves typically seek to fix attention on specific goals. They, therefore, favor modes of hoping that can be subjected to calculation and estimation, promoting a reasoned assessment of what is possible so that collective aspirations and expectations can be directed in "realistic" ways. This can lead to privileging the incremental over the transformative, the (technically) reasoned over the felt, and the probable over the possible (Baum 1997, 1999; Beauregard 2015, chap. 8). Planning processes are also frequently defined by fixed temporalities that may jar with other rhythms, including the slow, patient processes required to cultivate hope and aspiration and the diverse time horizons and hopes of those involved.

Hope is an intuitively (perhaps dangerously) appealing term. The discussion above has shown that, in its relation to time and the forms of knowledge required to act in the face of constitutive uncertainty, it resonates with core concerns in contemporary planning theory and practice, particularly the promises of community-led planning. At the same time, we have pointed to challenges involved in appealing *to* hope as an object of planning practices. This requires awareness that hope, as an objective for planning, points toward something paradoxical or even quixotic at the heart of the planning project. As a set of technologies that would organize the intangible not-yet, plans aim to instrumentalize and mobilize affective attachments to hopeful images of the future, frequently in contexts characterized by compromised possibilities where pessimism, doubt, and disagreement must be navigated. The uneven, gendered, classed, and racialized development of the "capacity to aspire" is a reminder that making hope an objective cannot dissolve the centrality of power and politics to planning. However, hope may nonetheless have the potential to orient critical analytical and practical attention toward a range of important facets of planning work that remain underexamined, including the need for scholarship to explore hope and aspiration to build bridges between what is and what ought to be, knowledge and action, critique and construction; recognizing that if "critical thinking without hope is cynicism. Hope without critical thinking is naiveté" (Popova, cited by Solnit 2016, xii).

To further our consideration of these issues, we now turn to our own modest efforts to explore how hope might be organized through community-led planning. After introducing the case, we discuss our research methods before exploring some of the key challenges we encountered. Reflecting on our experiences in relation to the dimensions of hope enables us to draw out wider recommendations for developing the relationship between hope and planning in both theory and practice.

The Westfield Estate: An Experiment That Failed?

The Westfield estate in the southeast of Sheffield was built as part of the "Mosborough Masterplan," an extension of the city's southeastern boundaries planned in the late 1960s. At the time, Sheffield was a relatively prosperous industrial center with a population of around 580,000 and near full employment in the metal trades, steel production, and engineering (Winkler 2007). The local authority-led planning of a "new town" symbolized the city's progressive ambition to secure improved housing and living conditions for the working classes. Promotional material boasted, "For future generations the word Mosborough will be mentioned to describe one of the most spectacular community concepts in this country" (Sheffield Corporation, n.d.).

The Masterplan made various promises to prospective residents, appealing to images of suburban peace, progress, prosperity, and social solidarity. Westfield was to be an exemplar for the comprehensive optimism of the planners and their belief it was possible to lay out the physical infrastructures within which a good community could flourish:

> we propose that Westfield should be regarded as a demonstration township, designed and built to show the way in which the master plan principles should be applied . . . (Sheffield Corporation 1969, 25)

Original residents report that Westfield was initially considered a highly desirable place to live, with visitors from across Europe being shown around the area. Even as the first residents arrived in 1974, however, the world was changing. The global oil shock of 1973 greatly affected the British economy, exacerbating long-standing problems of industrial productivity. Heavily reliant on primary industry and manufacturing, Sheffield was vulnerable to increasing international competition. Factory closures accelerated and between 1978 and 1981, the city's unemployment rate rose from 4 percent to 11.3 percent, increasing to 15.5 percent by 1984. Employment in the steel industry declined from 50 percent of Sheffield's workforce in 1971 to 21 percent by 1984 (Winkler 2007).

The Masterplan's vision suffered in a context of declining economic opportunity and local government retrenchment under ideologically hostile Conservative governments in the 1980s. A familiar story of postindustrial decline followed, exacerbated by Westfield being statistically "hidden" within a relatively wealthier area and, therefore, overlooked by targeted regeneration programs made available in similar places in the 1990s and 2000s. A high-profile murder in 2002 led to Westfield's belated recognition as a priority for intervention. Subsequent local authority regeneration plans characterized

the estate and its predominantly white British population as suffering from "extreme multiple disadvantage." These plans noted the center of the estate was now among the 6 percent most deprived areas in the country, within the 3 percent most deprived for education, skills, and training and the 10 percent most deprived for income levels, employment, and health, with crime rates considerably higher than city and national averages (Sheffield City Council [SCC] 2009).

As the 2007 global financial crisis began, many of the regeneration plan's proposals remained unimplemented, and the consequences of long-term disinvestment were increasingly apparent in the physical environment. The original masterplan made careful provision for wide-ranging public facilities and services including parks, community centers, primary and secondary schools, and a doctor's surgery. By 2012, none of the parks were actively maintained, the secondary school had been relocated, the post office closed, and the doctor's surgery and last remaining community center were under threat of closure. Expressing a widespread sentiment, one local resident told us, "this area is an experiment that has failed."

Unprecedented cuts to public budgets followed, imposed by Conservative-led governments under the aegis of austerity. Rather than something new, austerity urbanism exacerbated longer running processes of disinvestment in Westfield (Peck 2012), effectively ending national regeneration funding while drastically reducing the resources and capacity of the local state.[4] The optimistic, if paternalistic, promises of postwar planning that created Westfield have seemingly unraveled, creating a need for new planning approaches to restore hope for the future. It was in this context that the Big Local program launched in the area.

Big Local: A New Mode of Hoping for Westfield?

In 2012, following discussions with SCC, Westfield residents were awarded £1 million to invest in neighborhood improvements under a nongovernmental, national lottery–funded program called *Big Local*. Explicitly targeting areas of need with little track record of regeneration funding, 150 Big Local areas were designated in three waves across England. Westfield was in the third wave.

Unusually, Big Local had no bidding process, its philosophy resting on a perceived potential for effective community development to emerge from the bottom up through largely organic processes (e.g., Local Trust, n.d.). As a result, it was not anchored in existing organizations, but entrusted to groups of residents who responded to promotional material. Local Trust, the program's national body, employed "reps" to get each community started and provide light-touch support. In addition, they organized networking events for residents from Big Local areas to exchange ideas and experiences. The process was intended to be flexible and straightforward, ensuring it remained explicitly resident-led. Nascent groups were charged with engaging their community to explore local needs, assets, and aspirations, developing an area profile, a vision for change, and a plan to invest £1 million over ten years to "make a positive and lasting difference" to people's lives, generating "hope for a better future" (Community Development Foundation 2014, 10).

Big Local's approach to empowering communities sat uneasily alongside concurrent governmental attempts to promote a "Big Society," encouraging civil society groups to fill the gaps left by a retreating state (Taylor 2008). However, in its desire to fit diverse contexts, capacities, and knowledges, the program draws on prevailing ideas of asset-based development and community-led planning, echoing Appadurai's (2013) understanding of the patience required to build a new politics of hope.

The definition of clear "stages" and the requirement to produce certain outputs (profile, vision, plan) to access funding also, however, illustrate continued reliance on certain organizational technologies of planning. In this regard, Big Local can offer insights into the challenges of organizing hope through community-led planning in the context of austerity and a diminishing local state. To explore these insights, this paper draws on more than three years of engaged action learning and research work with the group of residents who formed to direct Westfield's Big Local process. This period, 2013–2016, culminated in the adoption of an "interim" three-year plan. Our involvement rested on a new community–university partnership that sought to work through the "resident-led" ethos of Big Local to try and ensure the benefits of working together were shared (Winkler 2013).

To support the production of the plan, students and faculty facilitated four workshops, addressing key issues and evidence for a profile of Westfield, producing a vision, agreeing on priorities, and drafting a plan. As formal members of Westfield Big Local, we were closely involved in the production and approval of the interim plan. In what follows, we draw on this experience, supplemented by more than thirty reflective interviews with participants and local service providers, along with background analysis of documents related to past planning and regeneration efforts.

Getting People in the Mood for Change

One of the first challenges facing Big Local in Westfield was getting people involved. SCC's (2009, 23) regeneration action plan suggested many residents struggled to imagine how life in Westfield could be improved, relating this to "low aspirations and apathy." Sam, an experienced community development worker in the area, put it more sensitively, ". . . people have lost heart, they've struggled for so long that they think, how am I going to dig myself out of this?" Tellingly, he went on, ". . . but, I don't know how you create aspiration . . . it's a difficult thing to do."

When encouraged to get involved, many residents seemed wary of consultation and weary of waiting for change that

had been promised by public authorities in the past. Over time, we came to understand this not just as the commonplace acknowledgment that people can be *hard to reach*, prone to *consultation fatigue*, or just uninterested in participation. It often seemed closely related to the "short horizons" of those living disadvantaged or precarious lives and the ways in which they shape the capacity to aspire.

An interview with Lisa, an unemployed resident, illustrated the way many people felt about the estate's future:

> . . . with how people are today, it's most likely not to change, 'cus the people I know today are exactly the same as the people when I were younger. So I know, deep down, that it's not gonna change.

Lisa's aspirations for the future revolved around her son, and she had little time for making plans in her everyday life: "I don't look to the future. I just take the day as it comes . . . I don't make plans, I don't do nowt, because my plans always seem to change."

Although not without hopes or ideas for how life in Westfield could be improved—"I'm hoping, sometime down line that it does actually start to change"—Lisa felt relatively powerless to take part in tackling the estate's challenges. Her comments revealed a particular mode of engagement with the future, arguably heavily circumscribed by the immediacy of poverty and the challenges of day-to-day survival. The practical economy of Lisa's "being toward the future"—that is, the manner in which she prefers not to look forward but to take each day as it comes—reflects "a form of existence ('being') that results in ways of grasping the world that are specific to the urgent necessities that govern such existence and condition such 'being'" (Allen 2008, 6).

Despite these issues, a small group of committed volunteers quickly emerged. Some had been active in a recently disbanded tenants and residents association (TARA), local Labor Party politics, or local social enterprises; few became active in Westfield Big Local without previous experience of community or political engagement.

Volunteers frequently voiced concerns about the apathy and lack of motivation they felt characterized the estate. May, a local resident, volunteer, and community worker, suggested reactions like Lisa's reflected a *pessimistic* orientation toward the future, characterized by fear of failure:

> . . . people don't come forward with anything because they're frightened of rejection, and that is a big thing on this estate . . . You hear it all the time. Y'know. This area, it's so de-motivated.

May's words highlight the importance resident-volunteers attributed to challenging this "demotivated" mood as part of any project to build hope in Westfield. Reinforced by deep-seated responses to complex life experiences, people's hopes and aspirations on the estate were complexly entangled with more negative orientations toward the future that created a range of feelings (e.g., fear, rejection, demotivation). Reinforced by the effects of austerity, attempts to explore aspiration and build hope had to work *in, on*, and *against* a "collective mood" of pessimism (Coleman 2016).

For volunteers, the hopefulness necessary to sustain their efforts had to be found in the face of fears that their aspirations for change might be undermined in ways that would reinforce this demotivated mood. Sarah, a nonresident Big Local volunteer, hinted at the fragility of the group's efforts to generate hope:

> . . . as fast as we do manage to move things two steps forward anything could happen to set them back. I think it would only take another really bad thing to happen in the community . . . there are lots of things that are potentially going to be forces against . . .

This representation of the estate and its mood as demotivated and fragile played into a doubled-edged political dynamic. On one hand, volunteers brought energy, experience, and a sensitive understanding of their community that enhanced their activity. On the other hand, their construction of a shared identity involved defining others as "lacking" the necessary levels of motivation, care, or optimism to get involved; a position at odds with the asset-based focus of the Big Local program. This dynamic became increasingly significant as the group began planning how they would invest the money, the process that would shape hopes for Big Local and that revealed significant tensions over the modes of hoping that would develop in Westfield.

Envisioning Better Futures for Westfield?

In August 2014, members of Westfield Big Local turned time-travelers, writing postcards to themselves from Westfield in 2030. Following wider community consultation, this visioning exercise was the first in the series of workshops we facilitated to support preparation of a resident-led plan. The aim was to generate inclusive discussion about probable, possible, and preferred futures for Westfield and the aspirations Big Local should support.

Resident-volunteers had attended a range of Big Local's national events, expanding understanding of what might be possible. Consultation events, including a gala and work on the community profile, had highlighted a range of priorities and some possible responses. Through the workshops, however, it became clear the group was struggling to articulate how their efforts could make the "positive and lasting difference" Big Local promised. Their postcards converged around a nostalgic aspiration to restore a perceived lost sense of community. The vision statement adopted following the workshop illustrates the central place this aspiration assumed:

> To develop the Westfield community to its full potential, where people feel it is a great place to live and where

children, young people and adults feel included and are inspired to be the best they can be.

"Community" was invoked as an antidote to the demotivated collective mood, a positive value that could be restored by creating opportunities for people to come together and participate in social activities. This vision was broad and inclusive enough to secure widespread agreement, conjuring emotionally charged memories of growing up or raising young families in a Westfield where neighbors came together for community events and people could leave their doors unlocked.

Foregrounding this "community of memory" (Baum 1997) helped strengthen relations between volunteers while linking a mythologized version of the past to a series of what seemed like manageable actions in the present and an indistinct image of a better future. However, it did so at the expense of exploring what this really meant for the "community of hope" (Baum 1997) the Big Local process sought to build. The vision was unclear how the future community of Westfield was being imagined, what the key issues were that had underpinned its perceived loss, or how it could be restored without engaging some challenging issues the group did not feel ready or able to explore (e.g., deprivation, joblessness, crime, drug use, and antisocial behavior).

During consultation events, some residents had drawn a strong distinction between "troublemakers," typically, young people located in the remaining council-owned housing in the center of the estate, and the "respectable" community, chiefly older residents located in owner-occupied housing around the edges:

> I believed in Westfield as a project . . . they were trying to create a mix of social and private housing . . . but it's just not worked. The social housing side has let things down by people being allowed to come and that's dragged the private side of it down, most people don't care. (Interview with Resident)

Many residents who expressed these views also had a nuanced view of "troublemakers" as a symptom rather than cause of the challenges facing the estate: "what's changed? People, the environment, nothing for the kids to do, absolutely nothing for them at all." However, Big Local could only respond to these challenges and realize its vision if it sought to acknowledge and bridge divides within the community, including by actively seeking out the voices of the so-called troublemakers, something some resident-volunteers resisted, and, despite repeated efforts, we persistently struggled to do.

Significant tensions remained unaddressed, then, as the partnership sought to move from their vision toward a plan. These included contentious questions around *who* Big Local was for in Westfield, how the vision would be implemented, and whether it could make a lasting difference when many of the most pressing issues facing the estate were felt to be beyond the group. As one resident noted in relation to discussions that were happening around making the gala an annual event,

> I got a real awkward question, well, it weren't awkward, a funny question, which even I went, what? And it was, "You've got this million pound." OK, yeah. "To improve Westfield. What's a gala gonna do to improve Westfield?" I got asked that question, and I was like, it gets the community together, it's about engaging. "But it lasts three hours and that's it, what now?" And they're right, because what now? What are we doing with that?

By this time, these important questions were increasingly focused on the future of the one remaining community center on the estate, "Com.unity."

Hopes Become Concrete: Com.unity

Com.unity [com dot unity] began its life as a community center in 2011; prior to this, it had been a pub. The site of a murder in 2002, it was characterized as "notorious" and a "drug den" in the press (BBC 2010), until it was closed in 2009. Funding for the conversion came from central government, and the new facility had a significant role in the local council's regeneration plans for the estate (SCC 2009). Its initial focus was youth work, and it had hosted a popular and important youth club. A downstairs area provided offices for the local authority's Multi-Agency Support Team while upstairs, there were café, gym, and chill-out areas, which provided computer and Internet facilities and played host to various public health and educational initiatives. In addition to this formal provision, the community workers who worked from the building provided a wealth of informal support to the people of Westfield. This provision was crucial to the role the building played in the life of the estate and meant that anyone could drop by to find help, friendly support, and advice on almost any issue.

As one of the few remaining public buildings on the estate, Com.unity had also been the locus for much Big Local activity, providing a venue for group meetings. It was to Com.unity, then, that two local authority officers came early in 2014 to inform the group that the council was withdrawing funding for the center. Although they said they hated the term, the officers called this a "Big Society moment." It was up to Big Local to fill the void as, under austerity-mandated pressure to cut budgets, the local state was subcontracting the decision about the future of Com.unity to the newly formed group of local residents. Following the loss of other assets, it was feared closure would be a powerful blow; undermining faith that Big Local or anyone else could turn things around on the estate. Residents on the steering group felt they had little alternative but to take over its running, making it central to their attempts to rebuild a sense of community. As Alan told us,

> . . . one of the things that I think Big Lottery [sic] has said is that we shouldn't be a financial substitute for what the local authority might be expected to deliver, however, in the real world we have got to.

Illustrating the mutability of hope, horizons of possibility within the group quickly adjusted and became attached to the prospect of taking over the center with the retention of Com.unity seen as a vital and highly visible symbol of the sense of hope that volunteers were struggling to nurture. The narrowing of previously abstract options into a single tangible purpose was, to some extent, welcomed. As May suggested,

> . . . the Big Local money, it's not a lot of money . . . but we've got this place . . . you put the right things in, education, youth clubs, things what people can develop in, what is not all about money, but about increasing the aspirations, then you're going to have a good community.

Negotiating a lease for the building with a view to a subsequent community buyout, however, raised further issues. Notably, under local authority management, the community center had been losing money for a considerable length of time. The costs of its future upkeep and the need for the building to rapidly become self-sustaining became an increasingly central issue, distracting the group from concerns about the longer-term sustainability of Big Local's ten-year investment. The anticipated challenges of raising revenue and managing the building also saw previously suppressed questions about *who* would be welcome in Com.unity—and by extension in the future community Big Local was creating—forced into the open. These are neatly encapsulated by an exchange that took place during a meeting at the university, where residents ostensibly discussed ways to make savings:

> **A:** Now, another thing, the phone here. People are always coming in to use it. X lets them in. You've got no idea who they are or who they're calling. It can't be right. It must cost a fortune. We can stop that.
>
> **B:** That's right; they could be calling Australia for all we know.
>
> **C:** Or they could be calling their dealer!

Implicit in this exchange is an emerging conflict between those committed to prioritizing the needs of the most hard-pressed and the informal support they received through Com.unity, and those more concerned with balancing the books. The latter were quite relaxed about limiting Big Local's community of hope to residents who could afford to pay for services. A principal task for the ongoing community planning process, then, was to reorganize nascent hopes around both the possibilities and potentially competing understandings of what Com.unity might offer Westfield.

Planning as Technology of Hope?

Baum notes "[i]t is not easy to move from the language of community to the language of planning" (Baum 1997, 275), and resident-volunteers in Westfield struggled to translate their vision into even a simplified plan focused on Com.unity, testing the resident-led ethos of Big Local. May's description of her attempts to rationalize choices, formulate outcomes, cost activities, and develop measures of success as one of the hardest things she had ever done, exemplified the extent to which the technologies of planning can seem "unnatural" to communities unfamiliar with them (Baum 2005). We can also identify other ways in which the mandated planning processes sat uncomfortably with people. An approved plan was necessary to draw funding down from the national organization. Because they felt they already knew what needed to be done (whether they felt they had no choice or saw real potential in taking over Com.unity), the question residents asked was not, "how do we create a successful plan for Westfield?" but, "how do we create a plan that satisfies the funder?" Understandably, for a new, and in many ways fragile, collective of volunteers, more complex or contentious questions often fell into the category of things we do not know about or do not feel able to do. Despite discussion in the workshops and the benefits of exchanging ideas with other Big Local communities, the planning process struggled to bring these questions to the surface or prompt thinking about how peoples' desires and aspirations might be put to work to tackle what they knew were big issues on the estate.

Volunteers were also impatient. Having assumed responsibility for the process, the group wanted to feel they were progressing. They worried the rest of the estate was watching, expecting to see results *soon* and feared that failure to make something happen would reinforce hopelessness and cynicism. This created a sense of urgency, frequently justified by the need to act on the demotivated mood of the estate. As Linda, a volunteer, said,

> . . . I keep thinking, it might turn round. It might change. . . . I'll give it another year but after that I'm walking. . . . Because it's, two years should've been plenty of time to get something up and running . . . Something has really got to get done because at the moment it's a waste of time.

This sense of urgency exacerbated the feeling that the planning process was acting as a barrier and preventing them from getting on with the business of making change, generating further pressure to treat it as a tick-box exercise. Tensions flared, therefore, when, alongside other nonresident members of the partnership, we suggested taking more time to improve a draft of the document. Following careful negotiation, a decision was made to strengthen the plan's engagement with the estate's most pressing issues. Residents each took responsibility for one area of the plan's activity and led on completing a pro forma designed to include the information needed to plan that action. When completed, we led on integrating these into a revised plan.

An amended version of the plan was subsequently approved by Local Trust, enabling the group to access £300,000 to support their activities, including taking on the

lease for Com.unity. However, rather than telling a persuasive story and organizing hope for the future, the plan had little buy-in from resident-volunteers and had generated considerable ill-feeling within the group. While residents were justifiably proud of securing support for the next three years of activities, the plan's warm language of community masked tensions over who would be included in Westfield's community of hope while deferring scrutiny of the long-term sustainability of investing in Com.unity or its prospects for addressing Westfield's most pressing issues.

Discussion

Above, we introduced Big Local as a program that seeks to deploy planning as a participatory technology to organize new modes of hoping in disadvantaged neighborhoods. The program advocates a slow and patient approach, building the capacity of communities to explore and pursue collective aspirations. Like Appadurai (2013), advocates of community-led planning and asset-based community development, Big Local shares a belief in communities' abilities to mobilize to tackle their problems and build hope for a better future. We have followed how this understanding hit the ground in Westfield, situating the process and its outcomes within a wider sociopolitical context of long-running disinvestment and government-mandated austerity.

In this section, we first characterize the distinctive "mode of hoping" that emerged through Westfield Big Local, relating this to the four dimensions of hope introduced at the start of the paper: temporality, emotion/reason, uncertainty, and mutability. Having done so, we draw out the wider contributions of the paper for theory and practice by exploring how these experiences resonate with broader challenges involved in appealing *to* hope as an organizing principle for planning.

If aspirations for the future of Westfield circulated around the rebuilding of community, by the time the interim plan was formally approved, hopes for achieving this were being invested in running Com.unity. The community–university partnership through which we were working had, however, come under strain as the process unfolded, illustrating some of the potential "dilemmas and responsibilities arising from temporary involvement in other people's lives and hopes" (Ward and Hamdi 2004, xi). This was partly due to our concerns that the "future nostalgia" underpinning the adopted vision was a "fantastical" or "false" mode of hoping (Zournazi 2002, 12), representing a failure to acknowledge critical issues around who would be welcome in Westfield's community of hope, and an unwillingness to examine whether Com.unity could be run in an inclusive and sustainable way.

While a useful reminder that hope is *mutable* offers no guarantees and can be readily worked "in a negative frame" (Zournazi 2002, 15), our concerns are unlikely to surprise planning theorists attuned to the ambivalences and dangers of investing in community as a site for building progressive

hope (Baum 1997, 2005). Rather than offering *another* negative case study of exclusionary community politics, however, we aim here to draw on the constructive spirit of both hope and planning scholarship to explore what can be learned from the ways in which this mode of hoping "took place" (Anderson 2006) as a situated response to a complex "politics of space-time" (Raco, Henderson, and Bowlby 2008). In doing so, we draw on others who have acknowledged the value of learning from perceived failure in planning (Campbell, Forester, and Sanyal 2018), recognizing that "[w]hen practices cannot be considered 'best ones' they might still be worth attention" (Saija 2014, 190).

The aspiration to foster community in Westfield and the particular forms it took were shaped by a complex set of forces, unfolding over a range of temporalities. Attempts to turn things around on the estate had to contend with the ways long-running processes of disinvestment in the built and social fabric of the estate interacted with the stalling of regeneration plans as a result of the global financial crisis and subsequent imposition of austerity. These wider forces had led to promises going unfulfilled and the spaces of community life imagined in the original plan falling into disrepair, reinforcing stories about Westfield as a troubled place.

These temporal dynamics were linked to a range of affects that were understood to form the "demotivated" collective mood of the estate (Coleman 2016), shaping attitudes and feelings toward the future and prospects for change. People do not need planning to help them experience their "communities in time" (Baum 1999). Temporal horizons and what Appadurai (2013) labels "capacities to aspire" are always already rooted in the lived experience of place and shape distinctive forms of "being toward the future" that may not be readily accessible to planning efforts. The challenge for Big Local was to work in, on, and against the pessimism this was felt to have produced in Westfield to collectively generate a sense of new possibilities; for volunteers, this required an act of faith that things could be different. Hope was, therefore, central to community-led planning efforts, required as a basis for action but also an intangible force to be fostered through the Big Local process.

Even allowing for its commitment to a slow, patient approach to community capacity-building, the Big Local program had introduced a set of temporal imperatives into this overdetermined context, configured around requirements for plan approval. The sense of urgency and impatience resident-volunteers felt about the process was underpinned by their doubts, fears, and anxieties about the ways the wider estate was judging their efforts and the need to challenge the prevailing mood. Always subject to change in the face of unfolding events, such as the decision of the local authority to withdraw funding from Com.unity, the hopes of the Big Local group were fragile. These feelings interacted with volunteers' situated understandings of the estate, significantly shaping collective horizons of possibility, framing how they reasoned together and with us about what could and should be done. In setting limits to their

patience to consider alternatives, they also participated in closing down debate, forestalling the development of any more open-ended politics of hope.

While Westfield Big Local represents a single, situated case, our experiences resonate with some of the broader challenges involved in installing hope as an organizing principle for planning, enabling us to outline three, key, wider contributions the paper makes.

Questioning Planning as a Technology of Hope

Our experience with Westfield Big Local highlights the potential for tension between the organizational technologies of planning and the malleable and contested modes through which hope "takes place" in people's everyday lives. Big Local aspires to a "light-touch" process, developing the capacities of some local residents and empowering them to identify and confront areas of local concern. However, in Westfield, the few residents who got involved still found the process onerous, difficult, and time-consuming. As work on the plan unfolded, it was seen increasingly instrumentally; at best, a hoop to be jumped through, at worst, resented as a barrier to action. While the Big Local process and the need to develop a vision and plan did lead volunteers to engage with their personal and collective sense of hope, the imposition of deadlines and technical requirements to calculate, measure, and reason felt "unnatural" (Baum 2005) and struggled to connect meaningfully with the *felt* hopes and aspirations of those involved.

This may reflect the capacities of those of us involved in Westfield, or that the Big Local process was not ultimately as patient or accessible as intended. Exemplary work in other places highlights the potential for planning processes to provide spaces for meaningful dialogue that can uncover the deep roots of community struggles, contributing to collective healing and the exploration of hopeful futures (e.g., Erfan 2017; Forester 2009). Creative and visual methods of engagement, too, can elicit diverse knowledges and perspectives, deepening meaningful participation in community research and planning (e.g., Beebeejaun et al. 2013; Sarkissian and Hurford 2010). That the instrumentality of the organizational technologies of planning seemed to frustrate such possibilities in Westfield does not, therefore, imply the impossibility of organizing hope through planning. However, our research illustrates an ongoing need to explore how established organizational technologies of planning can be better attuned, not just to lay knowledges and people's capacities to plan, but also the "modes" through which hope takes place in their everyday lives, recognizing that this is always contingent upon deeply rooted forms of "being toward the future," mediated by complex histories, geographies, and considerations of gender, ethnicity, race, and class.

We should probably not be surprised if the instrumentally focused ways of organizing imposed by technologies of planning at times jar with attempts to explore intangible forces like aspiration and hope. Recognizing this, focusing on the paradoxical in the idea of "organizing hope" might usefully orient an ongoing search for planning approaches with the requisite humility and flexibility to engage with the complexities of hope.

The Capacity to Aspire and Its Relation to Diverse Modes of Hoping

If working through the potentially paradoxical meanings of "organizing hope" requires further careful consideration of the modes of hoping that planning programs, technologies, and approaches enable, we see particular potential in thinking through the implications of Appadurai's (2013) concept of the "capacity to aspire" for planning theory and practice. Reflecting on our experiences in Westfield suggests how capacities to aspire act as an underlying precondition, whether for developing a meaningful politics of hope or specific projects to organize collective hopes through community-led plans. As such, they might be usefully incorporated into prevailing understandings of the "assets" on which community development and planning efforts build.

If, as Appadurai (2013, 289) argues, "words such as 'empowerment', 'voice' and 'participation'" lack meaning in its absence, planning scholarship should consider how to better assess the capacity to aspire; how it might be cultivated and expanded in ways that promote equity, but also how its uneven development patterns community planning practices. Doing so might enable a more sensitive assessment of the complexities of communities' "being toward the future," the potential for hopeful change they generate, and how planners can sensitively respond to their as-yet underexamined influences on planning processes. In our concern to generate hopeful futures, both community-based planning theory and practice need to continue learning how to work with the realities and constraints of people's everyday capacities to aspire; enabling realistic and realizable hopes to find expression through plans, while remaining alert to the always mutable politics of hope in community settings.

The Value of Foregrounding and Anatomizing Hope

Hope is intangible and elusive, making it a tricky object for either empirical enquiry or planning efforts. Forester (2004, 251) counsels that "Planning theories should 'encourage hope' not to make us feel good, but to help us do better with whatever limited resources we have . . ." In other words, moving beyond the intuitive appeal *of* hope as a means of re-enchanting the planning project requires a deeper, ongoing engagement with what is actually involved in appealing *to* hope as an object of planning efforts. Thus far, however, beyond Baum's (1997, 1999) seminal contributions, there has been limited engagement with wider understandings of hope and a concomitant lack of empirical work.

Our argument above illustrates the value of identifying and tracing different dimensions as a means of deepening

understanding and beginning to gain analytical insight into the forms and mutations hope can take through planning processes. To the extent that it is woven from diverse temporalities, the interplay of reason and emotion and an openness to uncertain and shifting possibilities, these dimensions can be traced to help realize the as-yet underexamined promise of planning as the organization of hope. While none of these dimensions are necessarily unfamiliar to planning scholarship, this paper has illustrated the importance of tracing how they interact to shape distinctive modes of hoping. Further research might usefully develop and adapt this framework, while practice could explore the difference made by foregrounding these facets of planning work and their complex interrelations.

Conclusion

The distance between the Mosborough Masterplan, with its paternalistic provision for the good life, and contemporary realities of a withdrawing state putting pressure on the fragile and underdeveloped civic capacity of a deprived neighborhood speaks to major societal shifts and related changes in the scope, ambition, and modes of *hopefulness* of different ideas of planning. In this way, Westfield is a place where it is possible to see the unraveling of promises of progress out of which planning ideas and practices have been shaped and reshaped. The deceptively simple phrase "the organization of hope" usefully orients critical and analytical attention toward key dimensions of the challenge of re-enchanting planning. We have argued this requires an understanding of different time horizons, alongside an appreciation of the ways individual feelings and collective moods shape desire, affecting what can reasonably be expected in facing an uncertain future.

Reflecting on our struggles with hope in Westfield, we have shown why moving beyond its intuitive appeal as an antidote to the disenchantment of planning requires ongoing work. Such work might usefully explore how the organizational technologies of planning relate to the core dimensions of hope and how the uneven development of capacities to aspire underpins the diverse modes of hoping they give rise to.

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Notes

1. A term Baum attributes to his colleague at Berkeley, Stephen Blum.
2. A distinction adapted from Browne (2005).
3. Hope and aspiration are often used interchangeably. In what follows, overlaps in their meaning are acknowledged but hopes are generally considered more specific forms of reasoned desire.
4. Since 2010, austerity has rolled back the United Kingdom's welfare state toward spending levels more familiar in the United States. By 2015, Sheffield City Council (SCC) had seen 50 percent cuts to its main source of revenue (central government grants), cutting services "to the bones" (BBC 2015). National changes to welfare provision have also disproportionately impacted low-income areas like Westfield.

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