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**Ordinary citizens and the political cultures of planning: in search of the subject of a  
new democratic ethos**

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## **Abstract**

What is required of the citizen to make planning more democratic? In this paper I argue this previously overlooked question illuminates key challenges for democratising planning in theory and practice. Distinguishing between deliberative and agonistic conceptions of communicative planning I review the qualities these theories demand of citizens. Through examples from Scotland I then contrast this with the roles citizens are currently invited to perform within a growth-orientated planning culture, drawing attention to techniques that use constructions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ citizenship to manage conflict generated by development. I conclude by suggesting that whilst ‘ordinary’ citizens’ experiences draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses of deliberative and agonistic accounts, they also highlight hidden costs associated with participation that present significant challenges for the project of shaping a more democratic form of planning.

**Keywords:** ordinary citizens, political cultures, democratic ethos, communicative planning, hidden costs of participation.

## **Introduction: ‘ordinary’ citizens and the democratization of planning**

If the ‘communicative turn’ in planning theory has focused attention on the need to develop more inclusive forms of planning, subsequent developments have been motivated by different normative conceptions of the democratic qualities that should be fostered to ensure the politics of planning can play out justly and effectively. This has been most notable in attempts to articulate and then reconcile both deliberative and agonistic conceptions of

planning as a democratic communicative practice (e.g. Hillier, 2002; Bond, 2011; Healey, 2012; Forester, 2012). Both deliberative and agonistic planning theorists have been motivated by perceived failings in actually existing planning democracy, mirroring broader concerns that the political cultures of established liberal democracies are in a state of crisis.

One significant result of the legitimation crisis facing traditional representative democracy has been the intensification of struggle over the goals of public policy beyond formal political arenas and into the administrative spaces of the policy process (Brodkin, 1987), requiring policy-makers to search for new ways of legitimizing decisions and managing conflict in the policy process. Hajer (2003) for example argues for recognition of new patterns of political engagement where citizens are increasingly on ‘stand by’, waiting for issues that will ‘ignite’ their involvement and that often emerge at the ‘end of the pipe’ during policy implementation.

A key response to the increasing salience of end of the pipe conflict has been the proliferation of invitations to citizens to participate in public decision-making. As Newman (2011) argues, however, a key set of questions raised by participatory initiatives concerns the identity of the citizen welcomed into such spaces: if certain forms of ‘active citizenship’ are openly encouraged by authorities anxious to enrol the legitimising authority of the ‘ordinary’ citizen, more ‘activist’ orientations are typically considered problematic. Yet, if communicative planning theory has focused increasing attention on the need to foster ‘people-centred’ forms of governance as a means of ‘re-enchanting democracy’ (Healey, 2012), it is perhaps curious that the qualities required of the citizen have not always been central<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, normative theory has arguably paid relatively little attention to how the democratic citizen-subject it requires might be summoned. Moreover, despite long standing commitments to democratic

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Forester (1999) focuses at length on the skills required of the ‘deliberative practitioner’ but there is no corollary for the deliberative citizen.

participation in planning decisions, in practice high levels of anxiety attend to the identity of the citizens that turn up at the 'end of the pipe' and their ability to meaningfully and legitimately participate (e.g. the 'NIMBY' problem!).

In this paper I therefore argue that focusing attention on the subjectivities required of citizens can illuminate key aspects of the challenge of realising a more democratic form of planning (e.g. a form of planning within which all of those affected are able to participate in decisions either directly or through representative channels). My concern is to contribute to understandings of the ambiguous political potential that is opened up in the fields of power where citizens are called to meet state planning functions, drawing attention to both the normative construction of the 'good citizen' in planning theory and the often overlooked politics of citizen-subject formation in planning practice. Beyond this, however, by adopting a 'citizens' eye view' I also aim to highlight often hidden dimensions of citizens' experiences that have significant implications for understanding the political and democratic possibilities of political participation in contemporary planning.

The paper is structured as follows: I begin by critically reviewing the qualities that different theoretical conceptions of democratic planning might require of the citizen. Following this I use examples from Scotland to contrast these normative constructions with the limited forms of democratic citizenship currently invited in practice, drawing attention to a repertoire of techniques that use constructions of what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' citizenship to manage the conflict generated by development. These examples highlight perhaps predictable failings of existing planning democracy from the perspective of citizens 'ignited' by a political culture that paradoxically encourages their engagement but also defends against its disruptive effects. Finally I go on to consider what the experience of becoming politically active means for theories that seek to promote more democratic planning practices. I conclude that a focus on the forms and practices of citizenship fostered within the policy process helps to identify

important aspects of the change required to transform the democratic ethos of planning whilst also raising key concerns about the demands that planning processes make of citizens in the name of democracy.

### **The ‘good citizen’ in planning theory**

Deliberative (or collaborative or consensus-seeking) planning theory, influenced by Habermas’ (1996) model of deliberative democracy, is premised on fostering inclusive debate between all those with a ‘stake’ in a decision in order to shape democratic agreement about the best course of action. Agonistic planning theory, drawing particularly on the work of Chantal Mouffe (1993; 2005), has been presented as a critical counter-point to agreement-seeking versions of communicative planning. For Mouffe the political cannot exist without disagreement and any ‘consensus’ can only ever be the stabilisation of an existing balance of power. Pointing to the prevalence of conflict, strife and dispute in planning, agonistic planning theorists have argued for an alternative ethos premised on fostering respectful disagreement to avoid the coercive dangers of the search for consensus.

Increasingly well-rehearsed debates between deliberative and agonistic planning theorists have focused largely on the extent to which communicative exchanges can or should be geared towards shaping agreement or allowing the expression of disagreement. However, as noted above, the qualities required of the citizen, and how such a citizenry might emerge and become committed to either a deliberative or agonistic conception of what constitutes good democratic planning remains underdeveloped (cf. Norval, 2007). In this section of the paper I therefore sketch (admittedly generalised) pictures of the citizen that deliberative and agonistic theories of democracy would summon into being. I then use these sketches to consider what this focus means for accounts of democratic planning.

#### *‘The deliberative citizen’*

The deliberative citizen commits to the idea that “that parties to political conflict ought to deliberate with one another and through reasonable argument try to come to an agreement *on policy satisfactory to all*” (Young, 2001, 671). This requires her to engage in rational discussion within which she will forward reasons justifying her preferences and listen to the arguments forwarded by others. Her aim is to achieve a rational consensus (or at least some temporarily binding agreement) through deliberative processes that approximate to Habermas’ normative ‘ideal speech situation’, characterised by perfect communication between actors with equal power<sup>2</sup>.

Deliberation needs to be conducted sincerely, e.g. with a faith in the process, respect for other participants and a commitment to acting with a communicative ethos. This latter condition means that the deliberative citizen will not act strategically to pursue her own ends, but will earnestly seek to work with others to shape a rational agreement. Whilst elements of interest based ‘bargaining’ and ‘fair compromise formations’ are widely accepted to be the best that can be hoped for in real world conditions, in order to ensure that deliberation is free and equal and that only the force of the better argument is brought to bear on decisions, the deliberative citizen should commit to bracketing off the distorting influence of power on deliberation. She should therefore ‘check her privilege’ and seek to ensure that such distortions do not enter into the deliberative process.

The deliberative citizen is not necessarily required to leave her pre-existing beliefs, motivations and interests outside of deliberation, however, she is required to enter into a communicative exchange with a willingness to reflexively reshape them through inter-subjective dialogue (Chambers, 1996). Ideal forms of deliberation are also therefore a potentially transformative experience for the democratic subject, leading to new

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<sup>2</sup> It is important to note that Habermas’ (1996) theory assumes that true deliberation can only be achieved by the wider transformation of late capitalist societies.

understandings of interests, preferences and even of deeply held individual and collective identities (Warren, 1992).

Given this rather demanding set of requirements, considerable debate in both political and planning theory has focused not just on the (un)desirability of the deliberative ideal, but also on the (im)possibility of achieving something approximating genuine deliberation in real world conditions (see e.g. Benhabib, 1996a). Key concerns have centred on the impossibility of truly bracketing power from deliberation and ensuring that all citizens have full 'epistemological authority' in deliberative settings (e.g. Young, 2001; Saunders, 1997). This has led some advocates to question what commitment to a deliberative ethos means for the political activity of citizens who would seek to achieve it in real world settings? Young (2001) and Fung (2007) both conclude that 'deliberative activists' cannot always be expected to act deliberatively but might be required to denounce their principles and adopt non-deliberative forms of political action in order to fight against unjust realities that make fair deliberation impossible.

Others, however, have gone further to ask whether and why citizens would choose to organise their collective affairs deliberatively in the first place (Saunders, 1997), particularly where this presents such a challenging model of legitimate democratic behaviour. Norval (2007) further suggests that existing accounts of deliberative democracy do not pay enough attention to the processes involved in becoming a democratic subject committed to deliberation e.g. how can such a deliberative citizen be summoned and the requisite qualities fostered?

#### *'The agonistic citizen'*

For Mouffe (1993) the agonistic citizen needs to identify with the broad principles of liberal democracy:



What we share and what makes us fellow citizens in a liberal democratic regime is not a substantive idea of the good but a set of political principles specific to such a tradition: the principles of freedom and equality for all...To be a citizen is to recognize the authority of such principles (Mouffe, 1993; 65-66)

By cultivating identification with these principles the citizen accepts membership of a political community but not in a way that determines her identity - she remains free to argue between competing interpretations of freedom and equality. The citizen therefore develops an agonistic respect for other participants without being obliged in any way to strive for agreement with them, taming the potentially antagonistic results of disagreement such that 'enemies' are redefined as 'adversaries'.

For the agonistic citizen the aim of political action within this community is to secure the hegemonic position of a particular articulation of 'freedom and equality for all'. This means articulating new demands to unsettle an existing hegemonic settlement that is the sedimentation of an historical set of power relations. The task of the 'radical democratic' citizen, Mouffe's normatively preferred mode of agonistic citizenship, is to articulate 'chains of equivalence' that link together the demands of all those fighting against relations of domination, creating new 'us' and 'them' identities in the process. The radical democrat is therefore a counter-hegemonic activist.

Mouffe also questions the strict requirements of rational deliberation laid out by Habermas and his followers, arguing that the effects of power are not a distortion of a potentially perfect form of communication but an intrinsic element of all communication, e.g. there can be no ideal speech situation or communicative rationality that is power-free. Mouffe's agonism therefore encourages citizens to see politics not as rational deliberation but as a passionate activity which draws on registers of affect, influencing actors' attachment to particular

discourses. This means that the agonistic citizen is not bound by rules of rational argumentation and allows a wider range of political expression to be considered legitimate, including recourse to strategic and direct action, and rhetorical and symbolic forms of politics that are often potent symbols of conflict, bringing power out into the open so that it can be contested.

As Norval (2007) highlights, the agonistic focus on disagreement emphasises important aspects of democratic practice, but also tends to neglect the necessary institutionalisation of any democratic ethos, for whilst democracy can and does act as a valuable disruptive force it also needs to “act as the medium in which general purposes become crystallized and enacted” (p. 55). An account of democracy that focuses only on the opening up of lines of disagreement therefore seems less well equipped to explain how legitimate decisions can be reached (and what role reason giving and justification might be expected to play in such processes). By opening democratic practice up to raw political passions, some critics also worry about the potential dangers of unleashing and legitimizing undemocratic forces (Benhabib, 1996b). Here, Mouffe’s focus on the political as the expression of underlying antagonism arguably militates against the exploration of an ethos within which agreement is possible, where citizens’ may learn to make decisions together even across lines of difference<sup>3</sup>.

Understanding the demands of democratic citizenship made by planning theory

Key agreement seeking planning theorists like Healey (2006) have long argued that real world planning communication is unlikely to come close to the deep level of consensus implied by Habermas’ (1996) much cited ‘ideal speech situation’ and that more limited forms of agreement are the best solution that can be hoped for. They have also acknowledged the

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<sup>3</sup> Connolly’s (1995) account of agonistic pluralism may provide a useful corrective here though his focus is on the development of an ethos rather than how decisions might be made.

challenges of ensuring equality between participants in communicative exchanges, and the need to open up deliberation to different types of knowledge. More recent work has taken account of the agonistic critique and seeks to emphasise the scope for dealing with disagreement within agreement seeking deliberations (Innes and Booher, 2010; Forester, 2012), highlighting key qualities that collaborative governance should foster (Healey, 2012).

Agonistic planning theory meanwhile, having emerged as a critical, deconstructive response, has begun to explore the institutional changes required to open up decision-making spaces to legitimate disagreement (e.g. Bond, 2011; Ploger, 2004; Mantysalo et al, 2011). Theorists have also recognised that the distance between their arguments and agreement seeking models is not always pronounced. Few, for example, envisage planning decisions that do not require the deliberative exchange of reasons (Bond, 2011). Hillier (2002) following Benhabib (1996b) therefore argues for forms of deliberation that can do justice to the agonistic qualities of democracy. In this spirit, some recent work explores how an agonistic ethos might help productively reframe deliberative debates (e.g. Mouat et al, 2012).

It is also clear from the discussion above, however, that ideal-typical deliberative and agonistic planning (or any blending of the two) would require the cultivation of specific civic virtues, including particular conceptions of how the common good should be understood and what constitutes legitimate political behaviour. This is summarized in table 1 below. Following Cruikshank (1999) each ideal-type normatively expresses a “will to empower” that requires the production of citizen-subjects committed to what each takes to constitute the rights and responsibilities of good democratic citizenship<sup>4</sup>. However, questions about how such virtues are cultivated and what would lead people to commit to them as deliberative or

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<sup>4</sup> For example, both deliberative and agonistic theorists share an assumption that good citizenship involves active participation – potentially at odds with citizens who do not feel the need to participate outside of traditional electoral channels. As one reviewer suggested this may be another category of citizen absent from much planning theory.

agonistic citizens are not always clearly addressed (cf. Norval, 2007). This raises questions about how citizens within “precariously democratic societies” (Forester 1989, 3) might acquire the democratic ethos these theories require of them?

+++++insert table 1 here+++++

Much of the wider literature in political theory (e.g. Young, 2001), deliberative policy-making (e.g. Dodge, 2009) and planning theory (e.g. Purcell, 2009) has arguably tended to focus on already committed and skilful political actors (e.g. activists, social movements and campaign organisations). Debate has often focused on the kind of democratic ethos and practices that open opportunities to such actors. Alternatively, the focus in planning theory on the role of professionals in fostering such qualities has perhaps tended to implicitly assume the presence of publics able to effectively deliberate provided the spaces created for them are designed to be suitably inclusive. Hajer’s (2003) notion of ‘citizens on stand-by’ also implies the presence of citizens who are already technically equipped to engage but simply need to be ‘ignited’. This is an understandable bias within bodies of work that make important contributions to understanding political and policy action. However, the lacuna in accounting for the process of becoming a competent citizen represents a significant gap for understanding the ‘end of the pipe’ mobilisation of ‘ordinary’ (here meaning not previously politically active) citizens in policy-political spaces. In the next section below I further explore aspects of this gap by considering the identity of the ‘good citizen’ in contemporary planning practice.

### **The ‘good citizen’ in planning practice**

In this section of the paper my focus shifts from the theoretical to the empirical. Recognising that both deliberative and agonistic planning theories are rooted in critique of actually existing democratic practices, my aim is not to develop an empiricist critique of the potential

for emergence of either the agonistic or deliberative citizen. However, by contrasting these models of democracy against prevailing modes of citizen-subject formation I argue that it is possible to assess some of their critical potential and limitations. Moreover, this empirical encounter also reveals often hidden dimensions of the challenges faced by ‘ordinary citizens’ seeking to influence planning decisions.

The context of this search for the subject of a new democratic ethos is the recently reformed land-use planning system in Scotland. This section of the paper therefore draws on two related projects. The background analysis is informed by a research project that investigated the ‘culture change’ agenda that has accompanied a concerted programme of reform to the planning system since the reopening of a Scottish Parliament through devolution within the UK in 1999 (Inch, 2013). The bulk of the argument, however, reflects my ongoing involvement with a charity called Planning Democracy that campaigns for a fair and inclusive planning system in Scotland. This campaign has been informed by a project that gathered ‘citizens’ stories’ of participating in the reformed planning system, using these to make the case for change (see Planning Democracy, 2012).

The idea of collecting ‘citizens’ stories’ can be understood as an application of planning theory’s productive engagement with story as a means of learning from and about planning practices (e.g. Forester, 1999; Sandercock, 2003). All of the stories collected involved citizens active within community groups who had mobilised against unwanted development, typically they had formed to fight ‘end of the pipe’ battles against major development with significant environmental impacts. In total more than twenty stories were collected from a wide variety of geographical and socio-economic contexts, including communities living next to existing and proposed waste facilities, power stations, mines and quarries in the heavily populated ‘central belt’ between Edinburgh and Glasgow; major container terminal and

bridge developments up the east coast of Scotland; and controversial, large-scale housing proposals in and around existing settlements (Planning Democracy, 2012).

Citizens were invited to narrate their experiences chronologically, reflecting on key moments in their engagement with the planning system. Most stories were collected through meetings in people's homes where notes were taken that were later written up and where possible sent to participants to check. In some other cases citizens provided a written account of their own experiences. Methods were dictated by available resources, a desire to make participants feel comfortable talking to us, and the aim of growing Planning Democracy's network rather than by the imperatives of generating academic research material. As a result the stories generated were not recorded or transcribed, limiting the material available for subsequent writing-up and meaning, unfortunately, that citizens' 'voices' cannot readily be recounted here.

The stories collected were deliberately subjective and do not represent an exhaustively detailed account of participating in Scottish planning. However, those involved have confirmed that they faithfully reflect their often striking experiences of being 'ignited' as citizens in the planning process in Scotland, and the particular details reported here have been checked by several of those involved to ensure that they are true to their experiences. Below, I first discuss the ways in which 'good' and 'bad' forms of citizenship are defined by the dominant culture of the planning system. I then explore how this shapes the experiences of citizens seeking to influence development.

#### Pro-growth planning, depoliticisation and the management of citizens

The land-use planning system in Scotland underwent major reform with the passing of the Planning Etc. Scotland Act in 2006, the first time the Scottish Government had made use of new powers to pass primary legislation in relation to planning since devolution. As in reform initiatives elsewhere a range of diverse goals motivated change. Central to the rhetoric of

reform, however, were two key, potentially contradictory goals: to speed up decision-making in the interests of economic efficiency, and to improve public participation in the system.

Whilst the government has acknowledged a tension between these goals, the balance between them has rarely been explicitly debated. However, since the onset of recession and the election of a Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) administration “sustainable economic growth” has been further prioritised as the overarching purpose of the planning system (Scottish Government, 2010). The hegemonic position of pro-growth planning means that development is effectively synonymous with the public interest, the primary good that the planning system should seek to promote. This suggests that participation is subordinate to the goal of pursuing light touch planning and ensuring that any perceived ‘costs of delay’ in decision-making are minimised in the interests of development and growth.

The commitment to development as a public good effectively elevates a conception of the good above democratic rights to decide where the public interest lies in the use and development of land. In this context continued commitment to the language of participation, whilst remaining necessary to legitimize decisions, requires careful management. This is a familiar feature of attempts to incorporate citizens into decision-making, creating tendencies towards tokenistic participation that is only able to recognise citizens’ rights to a voice when it does not threaten the fundamental commitment to pro-growth planning. More recently this has been characterised as part of a post-political form of planning, where the hegemony of growth requires the displacement of the political energies that can be generated when citizens mobilise against development (e.g. Gunder and Hillier, 2009). The management of this settlement through the participatory and representative democratic spaces in the Scottish planning system therefore draws on a range of what Cruikshank (1999) terms ‘technologies of citizenship’ as it seeks to define the ‘good’ citizen. Two key examples can illustrate the workings of such technologies: ‘the education of the ‘good’ citizen’ and ‘labelling practices’.

## 1. *Educating the 'good citizen'*

Professionals have long expressed anxiety about the competence of non-experts to make planning decisions (cf. Damer and Hague, 1971). In Scotland this has led to a renewed focus on the need to 'educate' citizens and elected representatives not just about the logic of the system but how much they should expect to influence its decisions. This is apparent in the work of Planning Aid Scotland (PAS), an organisation that provides an important free planning advice service through a network of professional volunteers. As a body increasingly reliant on government funding for its operations, however, PAS has become concerned to reconcile the public to the realities of pro-growth planning:

PAS believes that effective engagement must lie at the heart of the Scotland's planning system...However, PAS equally recognises that efficiency and effectiveness in supporting sustainable economic growth is paramount. It is for this reason...that PAS wishes to put before the committee its concern that public expectations of the planning system are being insufficiently managed in terms of opportunities and rights to oppose planning decisions. (PAS, 2012)

The idea of "managing public expectations" makes clear a desire to promote certain forms of participation. The education of citizens becomes less an effort to empower them to influence democratic planning decisions and more an exercise in 'positioning' such that they will play the role of the 'good citizen' that the system makes up for them: active citizenship is therefore encouraged as long as it does not become 'activist' and threaten to frustrate development activity (cf. Newman, 2011).

## 2. Labelling practices



In the logic of a system that seeks to legitimise development and where expressions of oppositional citizenship are viewed as problematic it is common for citizens to find themselves ‘labelled’ or ‘positioned’ in ways that undermine the legitimacy of their voice (Healey, 2012). The most widely used example of this in planning disputes is the label ‘NIMBY’, dismissing opposition to development as parochial and self-interested (Burningham, 2000; McClymont and O’Hare, 2008). In addition, however, professionals often question the representativeness of citizens’ voices by reference to those who do participate as ‘the usual suspects’, a group of typically well-educated and resourced citizens disproportionately able to pursue their particular interests.

The ‘usual suspects’ are often contrasted against the spectre of the ‘silent majority’ whose interests professionals make claims to represent, often equating this with the benefits that development may bring. Such labelling practices are widespread within planning professionals’ discussions of citizens who participate in Scotland, however, there is typically less scrutiny of the ‘interests’ or ‘representativeness’ of other actors, e.g. developers, professionals themselves or elected politicians.

As with any such label the element of potential truth within it (there may well be NIMBY opponents, ‘silent majorities’, and ‘usual suspects’) detracts attention from the political operation of such categories and the ways in which they serve to marginalise certain voices, restricting citizens to certain compromised subject positions<sup>5</sup>: those who participate are narrowly self-interested and therefore do not need to be listened to; the views of those who do not participate can be inferred by professional or political ‘representatives’ as the authentic voice of the ‘ordinary’ citizen. As Clarke (2010) suggests, governmental strategies to enrol the moral authority of ‘ordinary citizens’ into

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<sup>5</sup> In response Planning Democracy has recently launched a short video entitled ‘Who are you calling a NIMBY?’ see <http://vimeo.com/75411526>

decision-making therefore produce a politics of claim-making where the power to speak as/for the 'ordinary citizen' is a key stake. In this way, as Pløger (2004) notes, the logic of the system is involved in constructing its own enemies and/ or refusing to recognise the legitimacy of adversarial perspectives.

These examples outline two of the ways in which the hegemonic position of sustainable economic growth is defended through the use of technologies of citizenship: the education of citizens and labelling practices are techniques that limit the legitimacy of political challenges raised by end of the pipe citizen mobilisation by 'making up' both 'good' and 'bad' subject positions for citizens. Below I consider such practices against the experiences of citizens who have sought to influence change through the planning system, highlighting how people seek to resist the always uncertain power of such technologies of citizenship and questioning the potential consequences of their deployment, both for those involved and for the democratic legitimacy of planning decisions.

### **Becoming a planning citizen**

*Being 'ignited': issues, interests, and values*

Hajer's (2003) concept of 'citizens on stand-by' suggests that the Scottish Government's key aim of promoting a less adversarial planning culture by promoting earlier engagement of the public does not readily correspond to the ways citizens typically come to be 'ignited' by issues. This was certainly true of the majority of citizens and groups whose stories PD heard. Most were not 'active citizens' aware of their rights and the opportunities available. They typically had little experience of political engagement or planning, sharing a broadly negative view of politics and often not understanding their actions as 'political'. Many felt they had not chosen to get involved but had been summoned by the unexpected news that an application for development had been made close to where they lived. All were therefore part

of a series of publics called into being by specific issues with significant local impacts (Dewey, 1989; Leino and Laine, 2011). As such their engagement was inherently adversarial, activated by their concern and typically opposition to the development in question.

Most of those PD met were homeowners, suggesting that this may be one key factor in shaping a sense of stake in the local environment, however, the preservation of property values was rarely cited as a primary motive for mobilisation in their respective local campaigns. Instead a variety of factors seemed to have motivated citizens to react: this included the disruption of valued place qualities (such as the loss of centuries old rights of way used by crofting communities in the vicinity of a nuclear power plant in the Highlands; or of public parks whose protected 'Common Good' land status was threatened in Edinburgh), through to the health concerns that motivated citizens to react against the proposed development of energy-from-waste facilities (incinerators) in the central belt.

Many citizens had become acutely aware of how others (including professionals and developers) sought to label their campaigns in terms of narrow self-interest and were anxious to refute such a reductive categorisation, feeling that it denied their right to care for the place they lived in or to articulate concern about issues raised by development. One citizen who had waged a long-running campaign to have alternative economic development opportunities included in their local plan, only for a developer to win approval for an incinerator against community wishes eloquently argued:

We did everything 'by the book', followed all the appropriate procedures and yet we are going to be worse off than if we had never engaged with the Development Plan process, while the incinerator developer completely circumvented the process and the planning system supported approval of the application... We are not Nimbys in this scenario...

This highlights both a high degree of frustration with the process but also engagement with a politics of recognition as she sought to contest the subject-positions she felt the system positioned her in.

People often spoke of the emotional impacts involved in sustaining protracted campaigns, highlighting how deeply committed they had become to the issues in question. Such commitments seem to consist of a complex mixture of perceived interests alongside sometimes deeply held beliefs and previously unacknowledged and emergent understanding of their own values. As in many aspects of life, these values sometimes encompass contradictory hopes, anxieties and concerns for their future, those of their families and wider locality. The process of being ignited had often led people to understand not just the issues involved, but their local area and themselves in new ways. For example, citizens ignited by another incinerator proposal in the central belt moved from very immediate concerns for the health of their children and those of their neighbours to active engagement with the perceived failings of local politics through to the need for new national and European policy to make sure that other communities would not face the same problems. This highlights how a limited focus on participants as rational actors pursuing their self-interest cannot do justice to the complex realities of being 'ignited' and illustrates the need to understand the identity of citizens who mobilise against development not as fixed and pre-existing but as at least somewhat fluid and emergent in relation to the issues involved, drawing from previous life experiences, current life circumstances and understandings of possible futures.

#### Knowledge, tactics and resources

For all of those involved, the process of being 'ignited', however reluctantly, had led to a challenging period of learning for which few felt adequately equipped. Most spoke of this as an ongoing struggle to understand how to influence decisions. In some places this was

rendered easier by the presence of professional residents with knowledge of planning and an expectation that they were entitled to participate. In a couple of high profile cases NGOs provided further support and expertise. In at least one, more working class community with a long history of living with environmentally intrusive land-uses people spoke of a strong cultural barrier that needed to be overcome because protesting ‘just isn’t the kind of thing we do around here’. This illustrates how certain citizens and communities (typically professional and middle class) are likely to be better equipped to represent themselves, or how others may be empowered to do so if an issue becomes a cause celebre. However, for all this remained a major challenge.

All of those PD met sought to engage and influence planning decisions through the windows of opportunity afforded by the system, making and encouraging written representations, and attending relevant committee meetings (though in Scotland it is very rare for the public to be given the right to speak at such meetings). The process of navigating the system was, however, characterised by considerable confusion and frustration, involving multiple wrong turns and the investment of large amounts of time and energy into letter writing and research that could later prove entirely ineffective. All also spoke of an incredibly steep and energy sapping learning curve as they spent their evenings and weekends gaining the expertise they needed to frame arguments that would be valid in ‘planning terms’. Most felt that they were constantly struggling to keep abreast with developments that seemed to proceed behind their backs as developers and local planning authorities met. As one of the anti-incinerator campaigners introduced above suggested, “We felt like we were getting on the train at the last stop, everyone else is more prepared, decisions seem to be already made.”

Engaging in these official forms of deliberative activity was time consuming and laborious, and involved community members communicating on the terms set by the expert driven system. Many, sensing or experiencing real limits to the effectiveness of this approach also

sought to register their opposition in other ways, organising community meetings and protests outside council meetings or on election days, seeking to gain local press coverage through direct action (e.g. by blocking roads with slow moving traffic or organising mass Christmas card writing campaigns to the Scottish Government). Citizens often felt such forms of activism were more successful in generating popular pressure, politicising issues and challenging elected representatives. However, the planning system often remained impervious to such pressures. In a third campaign against an incinerator, the local community generated some 5,000 objections influencing the local authority's decision to refuse the application, only for the applicant to successfully appeal to the Scottish Government (even had the original decision been upheld, in Scotland this would not have prevented the applicant from simply submitting a revised scheme for the same site, potentially requiring a rerun of the entire process, something that many communities lived in real fear of given the time and energy required).

#### Campaigns and relationship building

Organising a campaign group often brought people together and created new attachments within local communities. However, the membership and strength of groups was typically unstable, tending to dwindle over the extended life of many campaigns. Most campaigns seemed to be sustained by the persistence of a small group of committed volunteers who sought to mobilise others as and when possible to generate funds or write representations. The framing of campaigns typically involved the articulation of a claim to represent a particular place and its qualities. This was not always accepted without contestation, and in certain cases disputes did develop between those for and against certain developments. This was particularly visible in the case of the park in Edinburgh where 'Common Good' land was proposed as the site of a new school—splitting the local community and leading to a long-

running and often bitterly contested struggle, including attempts to publicly ‘name and shame’ opponents of the development.

As noted above, in some cases NGO support provided links that could reinforce citizens’ knowledge and ability to represent themselves. Online and personal communications with other campaign groups fighting against similar developments were also common. However, even where citizens developed wider concerns for the issues raised (for example the development of incinerators) for most the focus of their campaign remained necessarily local, bound by the specific proposal involved and the logic of a planning system that is focused on site specific decision-making (cf. Rootes, 2007).

Relations between campaign groups and local authorities were mixed and often related to past experiences and the authority’s view of the development in question. Whilst many sought to keep lines of communication open and relations amicable, few found planning officers sympathetic or willing to act as ‘guerillas in the bureaucracy’ on their behalf (cf. Gonzalez and Vigar, 2009). Relations with elected representatives were also often characterised by a general culture (and some specific histories) of mistrust. Sometimes they were also frustrated by rules that limit elected officials to a quasi-judicial role in making planning decisions, preventing them from responding to many community concerns or speaking publicly about issues they will later vote on.

In many cases there seemed to be a tendency towards seeing officials in oppositional terms, viewing ‘them’ and ‘the system’ with considerable suspicion and campaigners regularly complained about the use of delaying tactics and misinformation to frustrate their activities (including e.g. local authorities ‘losing’ large numbers of objections or announcing consultation periods during school holidays).

Some groups sought to engage with developers and in return certain developers too were willing to reciprocate, sending representatives to meet with concerned citizens. However, it was more typical for relations of mistrust to characterise this relationship, with neither ‘side’ willing to ‘reveal their hand’ and each apparently withholding information from the other. Faced with concerted local opposition, moreover, communities often reported that developers employed a variety of coercive strategies. These ranged from the employment of public relations specialists to conduct consultation exercises, to an unwillingness to release background data (often by invoking ‘commercial confidentiality’), through to the issuing of threats of legal action against named members of community councils opposing projects. For example, in the case of the community who had campaigned positively for alternatives only for an incinerator application to be approved, a threat by the developer to pursue legal action against campaigners led them to abandon a possible Judicial Review of the decision. Practices of this sort clearly sit outside any norms of democratic planning yet are rarely subjected to scrutiny.

#### Public participation, private lives

One of the striking aspects of all the stories was the extent to which campaigns became a key part of people’s lives, taking up large amounts of time and energy, often over a period of years. Citizens’ reported not feeling able to go on holiday for several years for fear that the next stage of a process would be announced and their opportunity to respond be gone by the time they returned. Some (who could) invested large amounts of money to fund the expertise required to participate effectively (e.g. planning, technical, or legal advice), for most this required intensive fundraising efforts. Others, dealing with the threat of legal action from developers, had to consider the possible consequences of their involvement. Many found it hard to reconcile the impacts that these battles had on their jobs, businesses, family lives and even their health. These more private ‘costs of political participation’ are rarely discussed in



considerations of citizen mobilisation, yet here they were central and often played a critical role in people's capacity to sustain engagement. The costs of participation also influenced people's subsequent disposition towards political activity. The high levels of attrition found amongst community groups should be understood in this context, many people simply give up making space for such exhausting activity.

### Trajectories of political engagement

For some of those involved, their engagement had led them to remain politically active in planning matters, becoming proactively engaged in future rounds of local plan-making. Amongst the case studies there were also examples of citizens who had gone on to studies in higher education for the first time, and others whose local engagement led to extensive engagement in national level debates. Some, becoming expert in particular issues had joined wider activist networks or environmental NGOs to challenge the policy positions that made certain forms of development acceptable (e.g. in the case recounted above to question whether incineration is a waste disposal method that should be acceptable in Scotland).

For many others, however, the experience proved disempowering, provoking feelings of loss and even leading to anxiety states. Some, disabused of an implicit faith that the system would prove transparent and reasonable, became somewhat cynical or mistrustful. Others, sometimes with long-running histories of alienation from officialdom, found their hostility towards the local state reinforced. This was not necessarily directly related to the result of the process. Some groups were 'successful' (at least temporarily, or were lucky enough that the proposed development did not materialise for e.g. commercial reasons), however, nearly all reported profound frustration and a sense that their voices were not listened to. Most would have shared the view of one citizen who, reflecting on a long campaign against a major biomass development on the east coast, suggested the process had left him "exhausted,

disillusioned and frustrated". Lying beneath this was a feeling that the process was not transparent or accountable and that decisions were less the product of democratic processes than of a deeply unjust system designed to ensure that development was imposed on local communities regardless of their views.

### **Discussion: in search of the subject of a new democratic ethos**

Having considered what is required of the citizen as a democratic actor in planning theory and then outlined the reality of some citizens' experiences of becoming politically engaged in contemporary planning disputes, in this section of the paper I consider what has been learned from this search for the subject of a new democratic ethos. As I do so, I consider the implications this has for further research and thinking about the relationship between citizenship and democratization of the politics of planning.

Citizens' stories of becoming politically active in Scotland's planning system highlight that both deliberative and agonistic conceptions of planning citizenship remain normative ideals, operating at a remove from the rules that govern actually existing planning practices. These rules seem set up as a series of defences that protect an overarching commitment to development as a public good. The commitment to development is democratically determined by the Scottish Government, yet its legitimacy is limited and proposals often draw out tensions in citizens' willingness to accept this understanding of the public interest. This emerges as end of the pipe conflict, and draws out tensions between different expectations as to how the development of land should be governed. However, the cases gathered by PD in Scotland suggest that the ambiguous language of participation struggles to provide either an effective means of neutralising this conflict or meaningful opportunities to democratize decision-making.

Citizens ‘ignited’ in response to planning issues in Scotland often draw on elements of both deliberative and agonistic political practice. As deliberative citizens they produce written representations and seek opportunities to engage in dialogue with decision-makers. However, the inequality of arms between citizens and professionals ensures that deliberation is neither fair nor inclusive. Some groups of citizens also therefore engage in direct action designed to influence representative decision-makers – a more agonistic form of political practice. However, the planning system is also set up to defend against such raw political energies. In short, those summoned by the planning system in Scotland are not currently invited to participate as either deliberative or agonistic citizens.

The hegemonic position of pro-growth planning in Scotland means that there are seemingly very few advocates for more democratic planning at present. The effects of recession and ongoing reform initiatives have consolidated acceptance of the overarching imperative of growth. This has led to a focus on improving efficiency in decision-making and on developing relations between local authorities and the development sector in order to facilitate development more effectively – building cultures within which the politicisation of plans or proposals through representative or participatory democratic channels readily comes to be seen as a problem that must be defended against (Inch, 2013).

In contrast to the mobilisation of systemic defences against potentially disruptive challenges to pro-growth planning both deliberative and agonistic theories of planning therefore retain critical potential: each is capable of highlighting failures in the democratic quality of existing decision-making. Notwithstanding differences in the democratic ethos each would seek to cultivate, for advocates of either deliberative or agonistic planning democracy there is a need to bridge the gap between theory and practice in order to argue for the further democratisation of planning democracy, challenging the limited ways in which citizens are currently invited to participate and pushing to strengthen rights to democratic participation

against the hegemonic claims of (neo)liberal private property rights. One key challenge for such advocates is to work through the limitations of current approaches to participation to highlight the failure of existing democratic channels, using this as a basis from which to argue for change. From this perspective the agonistic emphasis on contestation and struggle in unsettling existing settlements and constituting new claims for democratisation seems particularly important.

Indeed, from the experiences recounted above, an agonistic mode of planning citizenship perhaps offers a more promising account of citizens' initial mobilization in end of the pipe planning disputes. In such cases citizens define themselves through the articulation of lines of difference between 'them' (developers and often local authorities) and 'us' (claiming to represent a local community). In establishing such adversarial positions there is a confrontation between very different logics of appropriate action: that of the market-led planning system and that of citizens staking a claim to democratically influence development that affects their lives. However, too strong an attachment to such 'them' and 'us' identities may also militate against effective relationship building and risk sliding into intransigent, cynical or antagonistic position-taking that can foreclose other, more deliberative possibilities (Healey, 2012). This suggests a need to further explore how citizens can harness the agonistic qualities of end of the pipe conflict and yet shape forms of policy-politics that remain alive to the possibilities of deliberation. The experiences of citizens and their struggles for recognition within the planning system in Scotland also therefore reaffirm a need for normative theories of democratic planning to further consider the qualities they require of the citizen and how these might be actively fostered.

Going further, however, these citizens' experiences highlight that the heroic figures of the agonistic activist and the reasonable deliberator present only a partial picture of the qualities required by the everyday politics of many planning disputes. As noted above, existing

literature tends to stress how already ignited political actors adopt a mix of tactics to pursue their goals: sometimes participating as good deliberative citizens but at other times adopting more agonistic forms of political practice. The citizens' stories that PD collected provide further evidence to endorse such an approach. However, they also highlight the struggles experienced by ordinary citizens as they mobilise and seek to understand how they can influence planning decisions. Most were not self-consciously political actors who thought of themselves as activists (indeed, in many cases this was definitely not how they understood themselves); their process of 'ignition' was far from automatic. Rather they were 'reactive citizens', struggling to learn and explore a repertoire of practices that often sorely tested their knowledge, resources and persistence. If 'ordinary' citizens' experiences represent an increasingly significant form of political engagement in "precariously democratic societies" (Forester, 1989, 3) then it seems crucial to learn from them to inform campaigns for greater planning.

In general localised, end of the pipe mobilisation has tended to be viewed with some suspicion. Within planning it is often casually equated with NIMBYism and related mistrust of the motivations of those involved, e.g. the potentially perverse effects of intensive local opposition displacing problems onto others less able to represent their interests (concerns that may sometimes be well-placed but should also not be universally assumed). This has often been part of a justification for attempts to involve people early on in the production of plans and strategies, e.g. before site specific conflicts emerge. Less technocratically, within urban environmental politics and social movement studies, local mobilisations are often seen as lacking progressive credentials where they do not readily "jump scale" to provide a broader challenge to economic or state structures (Rootes, 2007), with radical potential only existing where universal claims emerge from particular struggles (Griggs and Howarth, 2008).

As Hajer (2003) suggests, the increasingly pervasive nature of end of the pipe mobilisation suggests a need to find ways of working with the intensive political energy that can emerge at the local level. More than this, however, there is also a need to further understand the democratic subjects who emerge in such spaces, accepting that the ‘activist’ figure familiar in much academic writing does not immediately fit with the self-understanding and behaviour of many ‘ordinary citizens’ who find themselves in such circumstances (cf. Jupp, 2012 on other forms of ‘everyday’ or ‘ordinary’ activism). The experiences PD collected show how the intensely local dynamics of planning conflicts can generate very different trajectories of personal political engagement. With reference to planning theory’s long-standing interest in planning as a process of social learning (Friedmann, 1987), this suggests a need for further research to understand the ‘learning curve’ involved in becoming a planning citizen, the different trajectories such political mobilisation can generate and what motivates the journeys taken by different citizens. Further work might also develop a more empirically rich understanding of the longer-term dynamics generated by local planning conflicts, considering when and under what circumstances end of the pipe involvement might lead on to either involvement at more strategic levels of planning, or to the articulation of more ‘universal’ political claims.

The stories collected by PD also highlighted the mobilisation of strong political energies that ‘gripped’ people in more than simply self-interested or purely cognitive ways. The refusal of the planning process to acknowledge and work with such emotional concerns severely limits the potential to do justice to such energies. Instead they are often displaced onto the private lives of those involved or occasionally reflected back into conflicts within local communities. The high costs of political participation borne by those citizens who mobilise through the planning system are, however, rarely addressed within existing literature. This omission detracts attention from a major set of impacts that require greater scrutiny, potentially

reconfiguring understanding of the ‘mediating’ responsibilities of public professionals in managing the suffering and harm that planning processes can generate. That the experience of struggle imposes often unreasonable demands on citizens also presents a salutary corrective to any tendency to romanticise the agonistic emphasis on conflict, highlighting a need for a form of democratic planning that can also care for the citizens it engages, fully considering what ‘respectful disagreement’ should mean for all participants. Given that another significant outlet for unacknowledged emotional energy may be its projection onto the local state this also raises questions about the long term impacts that the operation of ‘systemic defences’ may have on the legitimacy of democratic planning (cf. Inch, 2012).

Though jarring with the long-standing assertion that planning is political rather than the preserve of any specialist technical expertise, pervasive anxieties about the capacities and interests of the citizens (and elected representatives) who do engage suggests wariness about entrusting decisions to democratic processes. For many the opening up of planning decisions to a more nakedly and passionately political process may threaten good decision-making or risk empowering already privileged groups to pursue reactionary interests. Such concerns further highlight the responsibility of planners to recognise and find ways to channel the political energies that planning issues generate.

Whilst Huxley and Yiftachel (2000) are surely right to argue that planning is about more than decision-rules, the debate between an agonistic opening up of disagreement and a deliberative desire for consensus at some level does revolve around creating legitimate procedures for taking decisions, recognising as Mansbridge (1996) argues that there are necessarily coercive elements to democratic decision-making. Debate must then revolve around who wins and who loses from any given set of rules, who is coerced, how, when and why. Within this picture enhanced procedural rights are not a sufficient condition for just planning (Porter, 2014), but they remain necessary as part of a struggle to democratise decisions about the use

and development of land in established liberal democracies. Indeed, many of the stories that PD heard highlight the importance of a sense of procedural justice to citizens operating within such spaces.

The argument I have developed here further suggests that procedural rules must also recognise that they make a wider range of demands of citizens than has typically been acknowledged. Arguably, existing theories too readily assert the virtues of democratic citizenship whilst paying less attention to the demands they make of citizens. In practice meanwhile, rules often seem concerned to defend a commitment to development as a public good rather than foster robust and inclusive debate about how places should develop. As a result, planning processes do little to engage the energies citizens bring whilst often imposing significant hidden costs on them.

## **Conclusions**

In this paper I have explored what democratic planning requires of the citizens it would seek to engage. Outlining requirements of the deliberative and agonistic citizen, I have argued that much existing theory does not fully acknowledge the demands it would make of these ideal citizen-subjects and has therefore sidestepped a significant challenge for the project of shaping more democratic planning practices. Tracing this through into practice, I have highlighted how various ‘technologies of citizenship’ can be used to defend against the potentially disruptive effects of end of the pipe citizen mobilisation within pro-growth planning cultures. By listening to the experiences of citizens ignited by such end of the pipe struggles, I have sought to highlight ways in which agonistic and deliberative planning theories retain both critical potential and limitations. However, beyond this I have suggested that citizens’ experiences raise further issues that have not been widely considered in existing debates. Drawing attention to the presence of a range of hidden costs, I have argued that they



raise significant questions about the demands that are made of people in the name of democracy. In doing so I have pointed to the need for further consideration of what political participation requires of citizens, the forms of democratic learning that they engage in, and the broader significance of their political participation. Overall, the experiences of the 'ordinary citizens' drawn on here point towards a different, as yet unacknowledged demand. A demand for democratic planning processes that can care for the citizens they summon whilst fully and fairly engaging the political energies they bring. It is a demand that remains to be addressed in both theory and practice.

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