

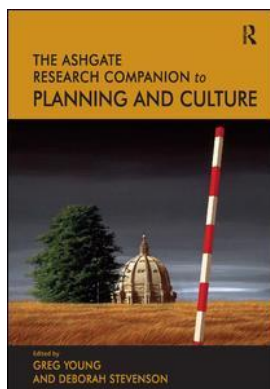
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.97.143

On: 08 Dec 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## **The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture**

Greg Young, Deborah Stevenson

### **What Can Planning Theory Be Now? Storytelling and Community Identity in a Tea Party Moment**

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613390.ch6>

James A. Throgmorton

**Published online on: 30 Sep 2013**

**How to cite :-** James A. Throgmorton. 30 Sep 2013, *What Can Planning Theory Be Now? Storytelling and Community Identity in a Tea Party Moment* from: *The Ashgate Research Companion to Planning and Culture* Routledge

Accessed on: 08 Dec 2023

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9781315613390.ch6>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# What Can Planning Theory Be Now? Storytelling and Community Identity in a Tea Party Moment

James A. Throgmorton

Earlier chapters in this edited collection have discussed shifts in planning and planning theory over time. As those chapters have revealed, planning theory took a turn in the 1990s, which – although challenged by rational-technical scientists and proponents of a Foucauldian conception of power – resulted in interactive-communicative planning becoming preminent.

The communicative turn is rooted in discursive democracy, and it presumes the goodness and effectiveness of ‘collaborative rationality’. Consequently, it has stressed the value of interpretation, argumentation, negotiation, collaboration, consensus-building, reflective and deliberative practice, and attending to the contexts in which practice takes place.

Events since the middle of 2008 have, however, witnessed the rise of a ‘Tea Party’ movement that sharply challenges most of these values. Thinking of themselves as ‘real Americans’ who want to ‘take America back’, a variety of people began objecting to proposals emanating from the new Obama administration. In the summer of 2009 they displayed outrage during ‘town hall’ meetings that elected members of Congress held concerning proposed national health care reforms. Soon the public discourse was full of talk about how ‘Obamacare’ sought to take away our freedoms and to ‘pull the plug on Grandma’. At the same time, accusations were hurled that efforts to slow the rate of global climate change were part of a radical environmentalist agenda. So too did fears of immigration by ‘illegal aliens’ cause Arizona and other states to adopt extraordinarily restrictive and possibly unconstitutional new laws. By November 2010 this new Tea Party movement had succeeded in influencing enough voters to give control of the US House of Representatives and many states to Republicans who had embraced the Tea Party’s core ideas.

How can planning theory adjust to this new context, where real dialogue appears profoundly difficult to accomplish or facilitate? What can planning theory be now?

## A Brief Overview of the Communicative Turn in Planning

Thirty or more years ago, a relatively small set of scholars in urban and regional planning began advocating a 'communicative turn' in planning theory and practice. Although they drew upon an eclectic array of scholarly sources, all their work was rooted in a careful study of planning practice. By the mid-1990s these scholars had succeeded in shifting the attention of most planning theorists, if not practitioners, away from older ideas rooted in technical rationality (Innes 1995). Additional research over the past decade and a half has provided further justification for making this turn.<sup>1</sup>

These scholars understood the communicative turn to be part of a post-positive, post-modernist or post-structural intellectual wave that swept across many disciplines and fields in the 1980s. Instead of presuming a radical separation between knowledge and emotions, and between science and politics, they argued that these spheres are deeply intertwined. For them, planning should not be defined as a purely technical process through which elite experts find the best way to achieve pre-determined objectives. They argued (and demonstrated) instead that planning is best conceived as a collaborative process in which values, knowledge and action are all co-produced through the interaction of diverse actors. Consequently communicative planning theorists focused on the social dynamics of practice in the context of particular places, institutional structures and processes of governance. For most of these theorists, the communicative turn also offered a way to include a broader range of stakeholders (including traditionally marginalized groups) into planning processes.

John Forester has played an especially important role in developing these ideas. In *Planning in the Face of Power* (1989) he argued that it's better to think of planning as 'attention-shaping, communicative action' rather than as 'instrumental action' which seeks to achieve particular ends. He claimed that planning has a strongly ethical component as well: to help create the possibility of democratic argumentation 'free from domination'. And he suggested a number of actions that planners could take to complement their technical work and foster more genuine political participation. In *The Deliberative Practitioner* (1999), he argued that planners are 'reflective practitioners' (who learn from one another through 'practice stories') and 'deliberative practitioners' (who learn through engagement with others). In his view these practice stories 'do work by organizing attention, practically and politically, not only to the facts at hand but to why the facts at hand matter' (1999: 29). The 'messiness' of such stories also 'teaches us that before problems are solved, they have to be constructed', and that the rationality of problem solving depends 'on the prior practical rationality of attending to what "the problem" really is' (1999: 37) and avoiding 'the rush to interpretation'.

---

<sup>1</sup> Key contributions to this turn include: Healey (2010, 2009, 1997), Innes and Booher (2010), Harper and Stein (2006), Throgmorton (1996) and precursor articles, Verma (1996), Mandelbaum, Mazza and Burchell (1995), Forester (1993), Fischer and Forester (1993), Forester (1989) and precursor articles, Hoch (1984), Schön (1983) and Friedmann (1973).

By the mid-1990s the communicative turn had largely been accomplished, at least among planning theorists in the West. This induced a round of intellectual, practice-based and political critiques from Hillier (2007), Yiftachel (2006), Fainstein (2005), Sandercock (2003), Flyvbjerg (2002) and other planning scholars (Healey 2012). In Healey's view, these critiques have enabled proponents of the communicative turn to sharpen their ideas about collaborative practices. The proponents' ideas have continued to attract attention, moreover, because they help practitioners deal with the uncertainty, complexity and conflict that characterize the contemporary context.

## **Persuasive Argumentation and Storytelling as Part of the Communicative Turn**

My own contribution to the communicative turn has been to emphasize the importance of rhetoric (persuasive argumentation directed at an audience) and persuasive storytelling about the future. This emphasis emerged from a dialogue between my work in the practical world and my engagement with other scholars. The origins of this dialogue go back at least to the 1970s when I worked, first, for a local air pollution control agency implementing the 1970 Clean Air Act, and, second, with a private consulting firm doing highly rational-technical research for the US Environmental Protection Agency.

In what follows I will offer a synthesis of my contributions. In brief, this synthesis will lead me to conclude that national policy-making and the places in which ordinary people live have both become far more complex than non-experts can understand.

## **The Complexity of National Policy Implementation**

Scientists frequently express dismay about the gap between what they know needs to be done (for example, with regard to health care or global climate change) and what actually gets accomplished in the political arena. They often respond to this gap by emphasizing the need to educate the public. Proponents of the communicative turn argue instead that it is a mistake to construe public communication merely as a means for disseminating knowledge because doing so provides no space for meaningful input from diverse citizens who lack *technical* expertise or have alternate frameworks of understanding, and it forecloses consideration of other important value questions.

The scientists' dismay makes sense only if one assumes a sharp divide between science and politics; that is, between facts and values. For major public problems, however, especially 'wicked problems' (Rittel and Weber 1973) that involve national policy implementation over a relatively long period of time, science and politics interact 'all the way down' – that is, to states, localities and the level of 'public talk'. In other words, policy-making continues during implementation.

To explain, let me briefly recall some research I conducted 30 years ago when the United States was experiencing the 'energy crisis' (Throgmorton 1987, 1984, 1983).

Several interrelated factors had created the possibility that the electric power industry might change significantly. Wanting to know in what direction the industry was most

likely to change, I focused on public policy toward the interconnection of electric utilities with 'independent power producers'. Within the context of mid-1970s efforts to analyse and solve the energy crisis and the historical evolution of the electric power industry as a regulated natural monopoly, I devised a 'national policy implementation' framework to discern how federal regulation was changing the industry.

Drawing upon the policy implementation literature available at that moment, and focusing on national policies implemented through a complex intergovernmental system, this framework articulated a series of expectations, including the following six. First, participants in the policy-making process would interpret the meaning of the new policy in diverse ways. Second, although the initial policy proposal and responses to it would be supported by technical plans and policy analyses, formal policy makers in Congress would adopt legislation that was 'good enough' rather than try to rationally calculate all likely consequences of all major policy options. Third, bargaining and negotiating among Congressional policy-makers would distort the original theoretical coherence of a policy initiative, and the resulting law or policy would be vague on several crucial points. Fourth, Congress would delegate rulemaking to an agency in the executive branch of the federal government, which in turn would delegate further implementation to state agencies that had their own sources of funding and authority. Given considerable discretionary power, and influenced by factors that varied from state to state, these state agencies would produce more detailed policies that likewise varied considerably. Fifth, unexpected (or unanticipated) events would occur during the process of implementation, and therefore cause participants to reconsider the meaning and necessity of the new policy. And sixth, parties that felt harmed by policy decisions would appeal those decisions to state and federal courts. Shaped more by political interaction than by rational analysis, policy outcomes would differ significantly from ones intended by the policy's initiators (new groups might, for example, be formed in response to the new policy's implementation), and the implementation process would take considerably longer than initially expected.

In brief, I found very strong support for this framework. I also observed a profound clash between the people who devised policies, laws and regulations, and the ordinary people who experienced consequences on the ground. For the latter, the effects of the new legislation came 'like a bolt of lightning' out of a clear blue sky (Throgmorton 1987: 359). The new legislation emerged from a process they neither understood nor could influence.

## **The Importance of Persuasive Argumentation and Storytelling**

For major public problems, especially 'wicked' ones that involve national policy implementation over a relatively long period of time, the interrelated activities of *persuasive argumentation* and *storytelling* play crucial roles.

Scientists, policy analysts, planners and other practitioners help form and implement national policies, but they can do so in a variety of ways. Wherever they act, they find themselves embedded in a complex rhetorical situation created by the interaction of three primary audiences (scientists, politicians and laypeople), each of which has its own normal discourse and agreed-upon conventions of persuasion. Given this rhetorical situation, they find themselves enacting one of several possible

roles: scientist, politician and lay advocate, plus three others formed through their interaction: the policy analyst, the advocacy planner and the political entrepreneur. In the centre of it all, conceptually at least, stands the active mediator (Throgmorton 1996).

As John Forester emphasized, a crucial aspect of persuasive argumentation is that these practitioners have to construct 'the problem' before they can articulate and analyse alternative solutions. This activity is deeply interpretative, rhetorical and constitutive.

It is *interpretative* because practitioners have to translate the messiness of ordinary life into 'problems' that make sense and can be acted upon. It is *rhetorical* in the sense that it involves persuasive argumentation directed at specific audiences under specific conditions. This kind of argumentation involves a social process of utterance, reply and counter-reply, which can be highly emotional. It takes place, moreover, not just at the federal or Congressional level but 'all the way down'. To argue persuasively, therefore, skilled practitioners have to pay attention to contextual features, especially 'the oral, the particular, the local, and the timely' (Toulmin 1990: 186). They must take their audience into account, be aware of differing or opposing views, and – since the meaning of an utterance always goes beyond the conscious control of the practitioner – think about how audiences construct the meanings of utterances (Throgmorton 1996). Lastly, how one defines a problem and articulates possible solutions is also *constitutive*; one's rhetoric has the power to include or exclude stakeholders who can influence action. Consequently, successful participation in processes of argumentation also entails skilful relationship building, negotiating and so on.

The complexity of process and multiplicity of roles combine to produce considerable uncertainty and confusion. Whereas practitioners working within the confines of a national policy implementation process might frame 'the problem' in technical ways, and have detailed ideas about how the process should be carried out, ordinary people would interpret it differently and find the whole process to be mightily opaque. Consequently, if one looks carefully at problem framing 'all the way down', one finds that storytelling plays a role that is far from trivial.

First, when something happens, people tell stories about it. The stories they tell are unavoidably selective and purposeful, with the purposes being tightly connected to the teller's emotions. Believing that policies should be based on facts and good science, scientifically-inclined practitioners tend to dismiss such stories and their telling. Stories, however, enable people to make sense out of facts (whether true or alleged), reframe how they think about events, and hence decide how they should respond to them (Simons 2006). When people share stories with one another, moreover, they build a sense of community and culture.

Where do such stories come from? In Hannah Arendt's (1958) view they emerge to an important degree from action itself. As she puts it: '[i]t is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before' (1958: 157). But action is riddled with frustrations, primarily because action and speech take place within a 'web of relationships'. Every action, therefore, stimulates a chain reaction and every process becomes the cause of new processes (1958: 168).

In this context it is important to emphasize that stories (for example Obama's 'socialist' health care policy will force us to 'pull the plug on Grandma'), which help people make sense out of particular facts and events, circulate and interact through *webs of relationships*. These webs involve both face-to-face interactions (which are



deeply influenced by the spatial distribution of people by race, class and other key socioeconomic markers) and virtual interactions via communication technologies and media.

Second, although storytelling is ubiquitous, many tales coalesce into and express locally-grounded versions of 'common urban narratives' (Finnegan 1998). For people who live in American cities, these narratives include what I have elsewhere called the Founders' Tale, the City as Nightmare, the City of Oppression, the City of Boiling Frogs, the Modernist Planners' Tale, the City of Ghosts, the Immigrants' Tale, and Sex and the Creative City (Throgmorton 2007, 2005). These narratives are in turn related to the diverse ways in which people feel connected to places, a point that I will return to later in this section.

Third, stories (or case studies) can also be crafted about an unfolding sequence of historical events pertaining to a topic or a place. Consequently the flow of utterances, replies and counter-replies included in any argumentative process can be emplotted as a flow of action and hence as a narrative (Throgmorton 1996). Here it is important to distinguish between listing facts chronologically and weaving facts together into a potentially persuasive story. The latter explicitly seeks to persuade a target audience to adopt preferred beliefs and actions, and its persuasiveness largely depends on the author's skill at the storytelling craft.

When applied to cities, city-regions and nations, persuasive storytelling about the future can be used to convey a vision of how entire places can be transformed in a preferred direction. This involves crafting texts that seek to turn the flow of action in the preferred direction through the use of particular tropes by particular characters at particular times and places. Success in altering the flow requires skilful attention to literary factors such as point of view, texts, plots, characters, conflict resolution, settings and tropes (Throgmorton 1996, 1992). It also requires awareness of differing or opposing views, and hence understanding that plans and analyses can be interpreted in diverse and often conflicting ways.

A crucial question arises at this point: persuasive to whom? One can construct a story that is designed to persuade a limited set of powerful actors. Conversely one can, by weaving diverse tales together, craft a future-oriented story that enables diverse people to 'make sense together' and hence to imagine jointly and create sustainable places. This kind of story would be persuasive to, and hence perceived as trustworthy by, a wide range of readers (Throgmorton 2003). It might also stimulate the diverse residents of a place to ask: Who are *we*? How do we want to live with one another? Whose story, what culture, what sense of community and what collective identity does our planning help sustain?

Ideally all these observations suggest the need for policymaking to be an interactive collaborative process. Storytelling can play a significant role in such processes (Innes and Booher 2010, LeBaron 2002). But not all potential actors are willing to engage with others collaboratively. Instead they often strive to exclude or marginalize other actors. Moreover, policy-making at the national scale might include interactive collaborative processes, but that does not necessarily mean that the collaborations will extend 'all the way down'. In this context, planners and analysts need to recognize the power of cable television news and radio talk show hosts to frame issues and shape how their audiences think. In terms of planning theory, this is a woefully understudied force.

In every type of storytelling it can often be difficult to discern the difference between bald-faced lying and weighing/configuring facts in ways that are consistent with one's purposes and interests. The difference matters. People make mistakes all the time when telling stories. Upon hearing such a mistake, a listener might quickly condemn the teller's story as a lie. Even when a storyteller gets the facts wrong, however, it can be wise to acknowledge the *rationality of emotions* (Nussbaum 1990) and to look for the *emotional truth* and *telling errors* contained in the teller's story (Eckstein 2003, Portelli 1991). This emotional truth can often be found by listening carefully for ways in which people misremember past events and tell the story to serve their purposes; that is, by listening carefully for a story's 'telling errors'.

Lastly, crafting a story is one thing, but telling it is another. In the end it is the *telling* that really matters. Why? Because the interaction between the teller and the listener has the *potential* to exert a powerful democratic force. When analysing storytelling, therefore, it is important to ask questions such as: Who is speaking to whom? What kind of person does the teller's story invite the listener to be? What kind of community does it seek to create, both among its listeners and between the listener and the storyteller? To achieve its democratic potential, therefore, persuasive storytelling must also make space for the diverse ways in which other storytellers have already woven facts into their stories, and hence to craft a more capacious tale that is more likely to persuade a larger number of people.

## Storytelling and the Construction of Place

In the previous section I noted that locally-grounded common urban narratives are related to the diverse ways in which people feel connected to places. *Place* can loosely be defined as a space that people have made meaningful – that is, a 'space invested with meaning in the context of power' (Cresswell 2004: 12). It has a geographic location, constitutes a material setting for social relations and evokes a 'sense of place' among its diverse users.

According to Doreen Massey (2005), geography scholars have identified two competing ways of conceptualizing *space*. One is a world of separate bounded places; it is a surface containing fixed, closed entities easily represented on a map, each of which has its own essentialized identity. The other is a world of flows, 'a depthless horizontality of immediate connections' (Massey 2005: 76) enabled by transportation and communication technologies. Massey rejects this dualism and argues that space can better be understood as 'a simultaneity of stories-so-far' (2005: 9) or 'plurality of trajectories' (2005: 12) in which 'space unfolds as interaction' (2005: 61). *Places* can in turn more precisely be understood as the unfolding of 'a power-geometry of intersecting trajectories' (2005: 64).

To comprehend how such an unfolding occurs, one might begin by evoking the idea of *home*. The house, neighbourhood and city in which one lives has no personal meaning until one begins inhabiting it, developing an emotional attachment to it and transforming it into a home. Thinking of a place as home often generates stories that elaborate on what I've termed 'the Founders Tale'. Such nostalgic tales typically focus on the families, institutions and buildings that have long been familiar parts of the place. At their best such tales can help people inhabit places with care, affection and a sense of belonging.



But they can also be profoundly exclusionary. For instance, they often omit the people who live in the place for a few years and then move on. They disregard the multiple ways in which the place is (and has always been) connected with the external world. And they tend to gloss over the aspects of the place's history that old-timers would like to forget. At the extreme, such stories presume that residents of the place share a common identity authentically rooted in history. In brief, such stories essentially claim, 'this is our place' and around here 'we' have always done things this way.

According to this 'essentialist' way of thinking about 'platial' identity, authentic places are under threat from a variety of forces, especially 'dangerous outsiders', mobile workers and tourists, and the homogenizing tendencies of global capital. In response to this threat, some people celebrate the place's unique features and traditions as an act of resistance, whereas others strive to exclude or marginalize unwanted newcomers. Still others don't see a problem; they advertise the place's unique qualities as a way of attracting new visitors and investment. Contrary to the essentialist view, therefore, one can argue that the meaning of a place is never finished but always becoming and always being performed. Such performances are, however, always constrained by structures (material landscapes, laws, rules, cultural and social expectations) that users did not create.

In addition to thinking of a place as home, one can feel connected to a place in at least four other ways. The five dimensions combine to form complex places and senses of place connection or, in Massey's terms, sites for the meeting up of 'intersecting trajectories'.

First, all places are, to one degree or another, embedded in complex technosystems, environmental pathways and intergovernmental linkages that tie distant places to one another (Buell 2001, Throgmorton 2005). Consequently our homes and neighbourhoods are tied to other locales via 'tentacular radiations' or 'paths out of town'. At the risk of belabouring the obvious, large urbanized areas such as the ones in which a large majority of Americans live could not exist without having the ability to import key goods, services and resources, and to export market products and contaminants.

Second, places have histories and are constantly changing. These changes superimpose upon the visible surface an unseen layer of usage, memory and significance, and hence places can be saturated with the histories of previous inhabitants and the events that have occurred in specific locations. If one has lived in a place for a long time, one is likely to be acutely conscious of that unseen layer of usage and memory. Even newcomers will gradually become aware of the extent to which powerful emotions such as joy, anger, love, fear and hope, circulate through the place via stories that people tell. As these emotionally-resonant stories circulate, they help construct a psychogeography of place (Coverly 2006).

A third additional type of connection derives from the fact that people are constantly moving into or departing from places. Thus any one place contains its residents' accumulated or composite memories of all places that have been significant to them over time. Having moved into one's place from somewhere else, one brings memories of those other places and the pathways leading away from them.

Fourth, fictive or virtual places can also matter. In some cases, as with architectural renderings of a possible development, such imagined worlds can have direct and immediate effects on the physical features of a place. But even novels, poetry, sculpture and scientifically-grounded projections and scenarios can exert a powerful influence

on people both consciously and subconsciously and thereby affect expectations, hopes, fears and choices about how people invest their time, energy and resources in the here and now.

To sum up: the extraordinary complexity of national policy implementation, the variety of rhetorics practitioners use, the ubiquity and power of storytelling, and the increasing complexity of places and place connection have created a situation that leaves many ordinary people feeling completely bewildered and often outraged. The situation has become ripe for trouble in ways that we planning theorists have not yet fully grasped.

Enter the Tea Party.

## The Rise of the ‘Tea Party’ Movement

In the months following Barack Obama’s election in November, 2008, a loose coalition of people who think of themselves as ‘real Americans’ began forming a ‘Tea Party’ movement that sought to ‘take America back’. Two years later this movement had succeeded in transforming public discourse and the political direction of the country. One might be tempted to condemn these Tea Partiers as neo-fascist ethno-nationalists, but that is not how they characterize themselves. Who are they? And how does their movement relate to the communicative turn in planning?

According to Kate Zernike (2010), the Tea Party movement emerged out of a powerful emotional response to the financial meltdown of 2008, the federal government’s ‘bailout’ of large financial firms and automobile manufacturers, and the subsequent ‘Great Recession’. Large numbers of people felt afraid of what lay in store for them, angry at those who had caused the meltdown and bailed out the big firms, and betrayed by mainstream institutions. Consequently, the Tea Party movement emerged from ‘the grassroots’ and attracted a large number of supporters. According to Zernike,

*Tea Partiers tended to believe that they had done all the right things in life ... They had earned their place in the middle class, and they were out to protect what they saw as theirs. They distrusted people they regarded as elites, most notably the Obama administration ... And, above all, they had a visceral belief that government had taken control of their lives – and they wanted it back. (2010: 10)*

Zernike suggests that their motivations were multiple and complex. Many, however, drew language and ideology from earlier conservative uprisings and from a long-standing anti-governmental current within American culture. Although there are differences of opinion within the movement, Tea Partiers believed (far more than other Americans) that illegal immigration was a very real threat, that global warming would have no serious impact, that gay marriage should not be legally recognized and that the US Supreme Court’s legalization of abortion had been a very bad decision. And they felt that people in power neither respected nor listened to them.

The earliest manifestation of the movement was an ‘Anti-Porkulus Protest’ held in mid-February 2009. Three days after that protest, a CNBC financial news commentator ranted on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange that the Obama administration’s

proposed mortgage assistance plan was ‘promoting bad behavior’ and rewarding ‘the losers’ at the expense of people who had followed the rules. He told the cheering commodities traders, ‘We’re thinking of having a Chicago Tea Party in July’ (Zernike 2010: 13). The commentator’s ‘rant’ ‘went viral’ and about a million people watched it on YouTube within the next few days. Fox Cable News began promoting Tax Day Tea Parties on its news programmes and commercials and dedicated an hour-long special to ‘The 9/12 Project’. The 9/12 groups that formed in response soon joined a growing loose federation of Tea Party groups around the country, facilitated by use of the new social media. FreedomWorks and other conservative groups that had been around for years contributed ideological guidance and practical political/organizational skills. Tea Party Patriots formed a broad nationwide coalition with local affiliates in every state. Tea Party groups held Tax Day rallies in mid-April, and soon thereafter they began organizing to confront their Congressional representatives about the proposed health care legislation.

To help people prepare for the ‘town hall’ meetings that representatives would be holding during the summer recess of 2009, a Tea Party Patriots organizer encouraged them to ‘use the [progressive organizer Saul] Alinsky playbook of which the left is so fond: freeze it, attack it, personalize it, and polarize it’. Pack the halls, he advised, and ‘watch for any opportunity to yell out and challenge the Rep[resentative]’s statements early’ (quoted in Zernike 2010: 83).

Tea Partiers followed the organizer’s advice. In a large number of very hostile confrontations, they accused the lawmakers of promoting socialism, trampling on the Constitution and trying to kill elderly people. More than 70,000 protesters descended on Washington, DC, for the FreedomWorks 9/12 march, and in January 2010 their favoured candidate shocked the political world by winning a special election to fill a Senate seat that had been considered safely Democratic. A month later the first National Tea Party Convention convened in Nashville. Supporters came to organize and to learn how to win elections, but they had difficulty agreeing on what the Tea Party stood for. Libertarians wanted to focus on economic issues and reducing the size of government, whereas social conservatives wanted to attack ‘multiculturalism’, accuse President Obama of being a Muslim in disguise who had not been born in the United States, take on a range of controversial social issues, and get rid of all big government programmes while simultaneously protecting their coverage under Medicare and Social Security.

On the day the House of Representatives was scheduled to vote on the health care bill, activists from the Tea Party and other groups swarmed the Capitol. Iowa Representative Steve King told Tea Partiers, ‘Let’s beat the other side to a pulp!’ ‘Let’s chase them down! There’s going to be a reckoning’ (quoted in Zernike 2010: 138). Someone called Democratic Party Representative John Lewis a ‘nigger’ as he was leaving the House Office Building, and someone else called Rep. Barney Frank a ‘homo’. When coupled with the many virulent signs that had appeared at rallies over the preceding months, this provided substantial evidence that, at a minimum, the Tea Party contained a significant contingent of racists and anti-gays.

As the months passed, Tea Party activists concluded that to defeat the Democratic Party they first had to remake the Republican Party in the Tea Party’s image. In part this conclusion derived from their belief that Republicans had contributed to the expansion of the federal government and that ‘Republicans In Name Only’ were not serious about cutting spending. This led to many successes and some notable failures in the

2010 primaries and general election. Most notably they helped the Republican Party (including a large contingent who considered themselves close to the Tea Party) to win control of the US House of Representatives, to gain seven seats in the US Senate and to win control of many state legislatures.

As noted above, conservative groups intervened at an early stage to influence how Tea Partiers defined the problematic situation that had emerged late in 2008. According to Zernike, ‘young Turks’ who were well versed in Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, ‘provided the movement with an ideology, largely libertarian and marked by a purist and “originalist” view of the Constitution’ (2010: 8). A 26-year-old conservative organization named FreedomWorks sought to ‘channel outrage into action’, while simultaneously giving people something to do with their anger: to organize. Led primarily by a former Republican Congressman and a young conservative organizer, it provided ideological guidance and practical political/organizational skills. FreedomWorks was underwritten by the Koch family, which had a track record of supporting libertarian causes, and think tanks like the Cato Institute, which in turn had been founded on the theories of public choice and the work of Austrian economists Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek. Guided by these Libertarian economists, FreedomWorks ‘believed that the market ... should be left free from regulation, with consumers and price signals determining the flow of money ... [and they] prized strict fidelity to the original words of the Constitution’ (Zernike 2010: 38).

So too did Jared Taylor of the National Center for Constitutional Studies who not only advocated returning to the founder’s original words but also praised W. Cleon Skousen’s 1981 book *The 5000 Year Leap*. He reemphasized Skousen’s claim that the Constitution had been inspired by the Christian faith, and that the framers had never intended for the government to take taxes from one group and spend it on another. According to Skousen, the founders’ first principle was a belief in God’s Law. ‘Without religion’, he proclaimed, ‘the government of a people cannot be maintained’ (quoted in Zernike 2010: 75).

According to Zernike, the Tea Partiers saw their connection with the American Revolutionary War as more than a gimmick or a metaphor. For them, ‘[i]t was a frame of mind. They saw themselves the way they saw the founders, as liberty-loving people, rebelling against a distant and increasingly overbearing government. By getting back to what the founders intended, they believed they could right what was wrong with the country’ (2010: 66). For many of these Tea Partiers, their reading of the Constitution constituted the only legitimate assessment of its meaning; all other readings were mere interpretations.

In their collective view, the Constitution did not give Congress the power to establish the Federal Reserve, to establish the Social Security system, or to adopt federal policies on education, energy, health or any other issue. So too they argued that the interstate commerce clause only authorized Congress to regulate trade between *the states* and to prevent the states from erecting barriers to free trade. Many also believed that Congress had violated the Constitution’s Tenth Amendment, and insisted that individual states should decide how and whether to regulate marriage, abortion and other controversial issues.

Lastly, Zernike reports that participation in the movement instilled a sense of community among Tea Party activists. ‘The Tea Party, they’re just everybody’, said an older woman Republican voter in Kentucky (Zernike 2010: 152). They saw themselves

as the nation's true silent majority and they trusted information from fellow supporters more than any other source. They saw themselves in a battle 'between righteousness and evil, between freedom and slavery ... To the Tea Partiers, it was an all-or-nothing struggle' (Zernike 2010: 127).

## What Can Planning Theory Be Now?

The tale just recounted highlights five features of the Tea Party movement's rise. First, it emerged in the context of a novel and extremely complex problematic situation. Second, its activists were driven by fear, anger and a sense of betrayal. These emotions and the means by which they were expressed provided activists with great energy and a strong sense of shared purpose and community. Third, already extant conservative organizations played a powerful role in shaping how Tea Party activists transformed the problematic situation into a problem focused on government failure. Fourth, their way of perceiving the world and defining the problem relied very heavily on essentialist conceptions of American identity. Their essentialist conception of who rightly can be considered a 'true American' and hence deserving to participate in American politics was rooted in legal, economic and religious fundamentalisms. And last, Fox Cable News, radio talk shows and new social media greatly amplified the Tea Party movement's voice.

How should proponents of the communicative turn interpret and respond to this movement?

For reasons articulated earlier in this chapter, my sense is that places and policy-making have both become so complicated as to defy understanding. The economic collapse of 2008 brought that complexity and incomprehension into sharp relief, and people who now support the Tea Party movement responded by retreating into idealized images of a nostalgic past. In making this retreat, they are being guided by an originalist interpretation of the US Constitution, a fundamentalist reading of the Christian Bible, and libertarian idealization of free market economies in a context of economic globalization; that is, by a very naïve, unstable and internally incoherent version of the Founders' Tale. Tea Party activists are deeply committed to these fundamentalisms and seem to be completely unwilling to engage in interaction, dialogue and collaboration with people who do not share their beliefs, and they seem determined to minimize the ability of 'traditionally marginalized groups' to participate in public deliberation.

At a theoretical level, the Tea Party movement and debates relating to it support claims by planning theorists that we no longer live in a moment when purely technical means can be relied upon to find the one best way to achieve pre-determined objectives. Instead, the Tea Party emerged in response to a messy problematic situation in which the primary challenge was to convert the situation into a problem that made sense and could be acted upon. Given this situation, Forester's emphasis on 'attention-shaping, communicative action' seems especially apt. Likewise, I believe it is ethically right to argue that the interactive-communicative processes through which problems are defined should be free from domination, and hence that plans and public policies should be devised through interaction, persuasion, negotiation and coalition building.



That said, the Tea Party movement presents a sharp challenge to proponents of the communicative turn. In part this challenge derives from the planning theorists' tendency to focus on planners and the practice of planning. This practice tends to be local in scale and limited in scope, whereas the Tea Party has a larger agenda focused on limiting the role of government and restoring an essentialist conception of community identity. In light of that agenda, communicative planning theorists are challenged to collaborate with other like-minded theorists and practitioners to devise processes that facilitate democratic argumentation about who we (US Americans) are and who we want to become.

In this sense, one might say that the rise of the Tea Party exemplifies the positive role of conflict: it will force planning theorists to pay attention to the movement's particular issues and interests, and the implications thereof for planning theory and practice. It will force us to devise practices that better accommodate extremely sharp differences in passionately held views. Those practices will have to acknowledge that people of whatever political persuasion have a right to be angry at times and to recognize that real public discourse – especially when people who don't normally have a voice also get to be heard – is usually passionate and messy, takes time, and requires actively listening to people's frustrations and trying to learn from them. In brief, it takes conflict.

The Tea Party's challenge also reveals the limits of defining interactive-communicative processes as an exercise in *rational* argumentation. The Tea Party's Founders Tale and argumentative claims that derive from stories related to it are ultimately driven by fear, anger and the sense of betrayal that Tea Partiers' feel. Planning theorists need to acknowledge those emotions, treat them as legitimate and make space for them to be expressed (Sandercock 2004).

What then shall be done with the erroneous facts, indeed total fabrications, that one often finds embedded in the Tea Partiers' stories and claims? They need to be challenged, no less than other factual errors should be. But theorists need to distinguish between blatant lying and weighing/configuring facts. Erroneous facts that circulate in webs of relationships should be treated as 'telling errors' that reveal what really matters to the Tea Partiers.

My own sense is that Tea Party activists feel fearful, angry and betrayed largely because they have been ignored and left behind by the transnational corporations that are shaping the economic transformation of the global economy. Strikingly, however, conservative organizations have managed to define the problem as a consequence of government failure. These organizations have proven to be very effective at persuasive argumentation and storytelling. This too is a lesson that planning theorists should learn.

Leaders of these organizations understand that they are authors who are articulating and enacting a story that is rooted in and, to a degree, consistent with what I've termed the Founders Tale of the United States. They know other stories are being told, and they are trying to turn the interaction of the stories in the direction they prefer by using particular tropes at particular times and places (that is, through persuasive storytelling). Consequently, the rise of the Tea Party movement can be understood as part of a struggle to define and control the spatial boundaries of places (at every scale from the nation to the neighbourhood) and the composition and identity of the community of people who live within them.

This poses an especially sharp challenge to progressive proponents/critics of the communicative turn. Sandercock and Attili's (2010) argument on behalf of multimedia-



based storytelling as a means of facilitating interaction, dialogue, collaboration and participation, especially on the part of traditionally marginalized groups, brings the difference into sharp relief. Tea Partiers embrace an essentialist conception of community identity, and believe that they have been marginalized and ignored, and hence that justice is on *their* side. Proponents of the communicative turn, on the other hand, believe that identity is socially constructed and emerges from interactive communicative processes. Given this divide, I see no obvious way for proponents of the communicative turn to facilitate dialogue between essentialists and traditionally marginalized groups (such as Latinos, African Americans, gays and lesbians, environmentalists and others). Instead of productively engaging in public conversations, Tea Party fundamentalists condemn efforts to promote dialogue and inclusiveness with people they consider illegitimate and lacking any right to be in America or to be considered a 'true American'. Believing there are 'real Americans' with 'real American values', and provided financial support from wealthy interests, they skilfully use multimedia-based storytelling to churn up fear and anger toward others.

The core of the challenge lies in a fact that most communicative planning theorists recognize but do not really incorporate into their practices; namely, that planning is deeply political as well as technical. This unavoidably political aspect of planning means that planning theorists need to articulate a coherent and persuasive *political* rationale for rejecting essentialist conceptions while also providing democratic space for both fundamentalist and multicultural ideas to be articulated. This rationale must be articulated, not just to fellow scholars in journals, but to ordinary people in the public arena. This rationale must include a process for addressing the two key questions posed by the Tea Party movement: first, who should be included within and excluded from this community and, second, whose stories should be told, be heard and legitimately influence the construction of place? In other words, we planning theorists need to devise a viable process for facilitating democratic deliberation about who we (US Americans) are and who we want to become.

## References

- Arendt, H. 1958. *The Human Condition*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor.
- Buell, L. 2001. *Writing for an Endangered World*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Coverly, M. 2006. *Psychogeography*. Harpenden: Pocket Essentials.
- Cresswell, T. 2004. *Place*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Eckstein, B. 2003. Making space, in *Story and Sustainability*, edited by B. Eckstein and J.A. Throgmorton. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 13–36.
- Fainstein, S. 2005. Planning theory and the city. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 25(2), 121–30.
- Finnegan, R. 1998. *Tales of the City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fischer, F. and Forester, J. (eds) 1993. *The Argumentative Turn in Planning and Policy Analysis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Flyvbjerg, B. 2002. Bringing power to planning research. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 21(4), 353–66.

- Forester, J. 1989. *Planning in the Face of Power*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- . 1993. *Critical Theory, Public Policy, and Planning Practice*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- . 1999. *The Deliberative Practitioner*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Friedmann, J. 1973. *Re-tracking America*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Harper, T. and S. Stein. 2006. *Dialogical Planning in a Fragmented Society*. New Brunswick, NJ: CUPR Press.
- Healey, P. 1997. *Collaborative Planning: Shaping Places in Fragmented Societies*. London: Macmillan.
- . 2009. The pragmatic tradition in planning thought. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 28(3), 277–92.
- . 2010. *Making Better Places*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- . 2012. Communicative planning: practices, concepts and rhetorics, in *Planning Ideas that Matter*, edited by B. Sanyal, L. Vale and C. Rosan. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 333–357.
- Hillier, J. 2007. *Stretching Beyond the Horizon*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Innes, J.E. 1995. Planning theory's emerging paradigm. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 14(3), 183–9.
- Hoch, C. 1984. Doing good and being right. *Journal of the American Planning Association* 50: 335–345.
- Innes, J.E. and Booher, D.E. 2010. *Planning with Complexity*. London: Routledge.
- LeBaron, M. 2002. *Bridging Troubled Waters*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Mandelbaum, S., Mazza, L. and Burchell, R. (eds) 1995. *Explorations in Planning Theory*. New Brunswick, NJ: CUPR Press.
- Massey, D. 2005. *For Space*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Nussbaum, M. 1990. *Love's Knowledge*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Portelli, A. 1991. *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and Other Stories*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Rittel, H. and Webber, M. 1973. Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*, 4(2), 155–69.
- Sandercock, L. 2003. *Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities in the 21st Century*. New York: Continuum.
- . 2004. Towards a planning imagination for the 21st century. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 70(2), 133–41.
- Sandercock, L. and Attili, G. (eds) 2010. *Multimedia Explorations in Urban Policy and Planning*. New York: Springer.
- Schön, D. 1983. *The Reflective Practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Simons, A. 2006. *The Story Factor*. 2nd Edition Revision. New York: Basic Books.
- Skousen, W.C. 1981. *The 5000 Year Leap*. Malta, ID: National Center for Constitutional Studies.
- Throgmorton, J.A. 1983. *A Bridge to a Distant Shore: Implementing Section 210 of the Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act of 1978*. PhD thesis. Los Angeles, CA: Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Planning, University of California.
- . 1984. Section 210 of PURPA as seen from a national policy implementation perspective, in *Proceedings of the Fourth NARUC Biennial Regulatory Information Conference*, edited by R.W. Lawton. Columbus, OH: National Regulatory Research Institute, 445–67.

- . 1987. Community energy planning: winds of change from the San Gorgonio Pass. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 53(3), 358–67.
- . 1992. Planning as persuasive storytelling about the future: negotiating an electric power rate settlement in Illinois. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 12(1), 17–31.
- . 1996. *Planning as Persuasive Storytelling: The Rhetorical Construction of Chicago's Electric Future*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- . 2003. Planning as persuasive storytelling in a global-scale web of relationships. *Planning Theory*, 2(2), 125–51.
- . 2005. Planning as persuasive storytelling in the context of 'the Network Society', in *The Network Society* edited by L. Albrecht and S.J. Mandelbaum. London: Routledge, 125–45.
- . 2007. Inventing 'the Greatest'. *Planning Theory*, 6(3), 237–62.
- Toulmin, S. 1990. *Cosmopolis*. New York: Free Press.
- Verma, N. 1996. Pragmatic rationality and planning theory. *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, 16(1), 5–14.
- Yiftachel, O. 2006. *Ethnocracy*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Zernike, K. 2010. *Boiling Mad*. New York: Times Books.