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## **Introduction**

The world of planning is a place of ‘wicked problems’ (Rittel and Webber, 1973). It is filled with ‘inherent uncertainty, complexity and inevitable normativity’ (Hartmann, 2012, 242). Planning theory may help new practitioners negotiate a course through this world. Nevertheless, how such practitioners find a their way is not so much a consequence of the classroom as it is the hands-on daily task of engaging with one’s work. For some, this involves simply according with the established traditions of their practice. For others, planning work involves existential questions concerning the purpose of one’s practice and one’s purpose as a practitioner. This paper focuses on such practitioners. In particular, it seeks to identify and discuss how they locate purpose in their practice and how this in turn influences their practice. The paper does this by exploring the role of narrative as a means for the self-determination of such purpose.

In essence, ‘a narrative is the representation of an event or a series of events’ (Abbot, 2008, 13). It has sense-making qualities that ‘reflect and shape local knowledge and help analyze that knowledge’ (Yanow, 2000, 61). This is achieved by the power of narrative to ‘integrate disparate elements of human experience into a more-or-less coherent whole’ (McAdams, 1999, 3). Attention to the role this power of narrative can play in planning has increased in recent decades (Childs, 2008; Eckstein and Throgmorton, 2003; Forester, 1993; Hajer, 2003; Mandelbaum, 1991; Throgmorton, 1992; 1993). Such interest has provided insight concerning the influence of disciplinary traditions on the ways we engage with our practice (Bevir and Rhodes, 2010), how narrative may be deployed as a weapon of contest in such practice (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Griggs and Howarth, 2013), and conversely, how narrative can serve as a tool that may be drawn on to resolve the standoffs so frequent in planning

(Forester, 1999; 2009). In this sense, much planning activity is ‘performed through storytelling’ (Sandercock, 2003, 12). As noted by van Hulst (2012, 300),

*Through telling and listening to stories, actors in the present not only make sense of the past, but also prepare for the future. This ‘future-directedness’, the imagination that is part of or that is enabled by stories, is especially relevant for practices such as planning. Although planning involves dealing with what the past had on offer, planning processes are of course always to a large extent about the future, as actors can imagine it.*

By granting ‘access’ (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006, 115) to the imagination of practitioners, narratives can not only tell us much about how those involved in planning perceive their world, but can also enriched our understanding of the how such practitioners perceive themselves (Forester, 1999; 2012). Indeed, for researchers engaged in interpretive social science, ‘identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who they are (and who they are not)’ (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 206). It is in this sense that, ‘through the work of interpreting our lives we turn them into narratives, and life understood as narrative constitutes self-understanding’ (Simms, 2003, 80). Therefore, it is curious to note that little attention has been devoted to how planning and allied practitioners constitute their professional identities *through* narrative. This is of particular concern for planning as how we come to know our ‘purpose’ as practitioners and the purpose of our practice is intrinsic to how we justify our actions. Consequently, such narratives speak of planning ethics.

Issues of ethics address how right from wrong and good from bad can be determined. Such issues concern the ‘soul of planning’ as a practice ‘premised on the expectation that through intervention and action better space and placed-based outcomes can be achieved than would

otherwise have been the case' (Campbell, 2012, 393). However, there is no simple blueprint for discerning the right and the good in a world of 'wicked problems'. Rather, there are only different, and sometimes contending philosophical approaches to identifying what *ought* to be done in the context of what *can* be done (Fainstein, 2010). The endeavour to locate a means to inform this normative aspect of planning has a long history and a short past, wherein there is an extensive tradition of justifying governmental action in the name of the 'public interest', while concerted effort to systematically examine the ethical dimension of planning dates back just a few decades (Campbell and Marshall, 2002; Hendler, 1995; Wachs, 1985). Such effort is perhaps most prominently represented in the works of those associated with the Habermasian inspired communicative or collaborative turn in planning (Forester, 1999; Healey, 2003). This approach seeks to acknowledge and address problematic issues of power asymmetries in planning by advancing the right to a voice in planning debates. As such, it is deeply influenced by a concern for 'fair procedure'. Nevertheless, this approach has not been immune from criticism. Indeed, the theory and practice of collaborative planning has been the target of reproach from those who consider the inherently political nature of planning to mean that issues of power and privilege can never be properly extricated from how people and places are governed, and that appeals to fair procedure may only appear to address power inequalities without actually resolving them (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2002; Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998). This Foucaultian perspective has led others along a different path. Here, an alternative power-aware approach to planning ethics is advanced that turns planning research back on itself to ask of the researcher 'who gains, who loses and what if anything should be done about it' (Flyvbjerg, 2004, 283). The focus of this 'phronetic' approach is on how power asymmetries exert a constraining influence on people with a concomitant prescription on researchers and practitioners to consider what action they should take in response to such knowledge. While admirable for its reflexivity, this overriding

anxiety about power inequalities can blind the researcher to the nuances of how practitioners may locate moral direction by reflecting on the unity of their evolving professional identity, rather than solely through attending to the particularities of power dynamics. This is not to suggest that either the collaborative or phronetic approach is misguided. Instead, what is proposed is that they may be complemented rather than challenged by greater attention to how practitioners find purpose in their practice.

Alastair MacIntyre's (1984) engagement with moral philosophy offers one path along which this issue of purpose can be explored. MacIntyre's project seeks to provide a framework for understanding the motivations that inform choice and action. In doing so, he eschews the deontological and consequentialist arguments most commonly deployed to rationalise planning as intervention for the public interest (Campbell and Marshall, 2002). Instead, he proposes reviving the Aristotelian view of 'practice' and the role of virtue in enabling good judgement. Retrieving such an ethics involves returning to the concept of purpose – to a concern with teleology. Hence, a central challenge of MacIntyre's project is to present an interpretation of teleology that is amenable to contemporary thought. This he furnishes through an account of how engaging with the traditions of our practice recursively shapes such practices. Central to this account is the role of narrative.

The remainder of this paper therefore considers the potential of MacIntyre's account for advancing understanding of the dialectic between perceptions of professional purpose and practice development. Accordingly, the next section outlines MacIntyre's framework. A lack of clarity as to how this framework may be applied to the daily world of planning is identified and a suggestion for how this may be overcome is provided by reference to the work of Paul Ricoeur. The subsequent section employs this combined MacIntyre-Ricoeur

approach to identify, explore and examine a practitioner's autobiographical narrative regarding the emergence of a new planning concept in Ireland. In doing so, it illustrates how potentially abstract theoretical concepts may be manifested in 'real world' planning situations. The final section discusses what can be learnt from this approach. It explains how attending to narrative furnishes a more nuanced understanding of the way practitioners interpret the purpose of their practice, and in doing so, may contribute to the development of that practice.

### **Purpose and Practice**

In his seminal book *After Virtue*, MacIntyre identifies, discusses and questions a number of broadly contending traditions informing modern normative ethics. The first of these to be challenged is the deontological tradition attributed to Kantian rationalism and forms of Lockean contractarianism that privilege rights and obligations by centralising rules within normative theory. This tradition has evolved from its original instantiations but weighs heavily on the philosophical justification for spatial governance where formidable concern for 'fair procedure' may sideline substantive debate on what it is that 'good planning' amounts to (Campbell, 2006, 97). MacIntyre criticises what he considers to be the pretensions of this perspective to ethical objectivity. He argues that this claim to tradition-independent moral truths advances ideological blindness by ignoring how seemingly objective ethical assertions are implicitly informed by the cultural context in which they are formulated (MacIntyre, 1984, 44). He also locates pretensions to this 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986) in consequentialist perspectives rooted in the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, whose inspiration underlies the justification for much planning activity (Campbell and Marshall, 2002). MacIntyre views as a 'moral fiction' claims that appeals to calculating the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' can provide objective justifications for actions,

especially in light of potential confusion regarding what ‘happiness’ entails. Drawing similarities with the deontological traditions, MacIntyre contends that such moral fictions are perpetuated by ignoring the contingency of one’s position within an historically situated and collective shared form of life that engenders a ‘moral reality’ wherein ‘one is orientated to taken-for-granted notions of the goods of that form of life...that in turn structure one’s practical reasoning as a kind of skill, a kind of know-how in making one’s way around in that life’ (Pinkard, 2003, 192). MacIntyre is critical of declarations concerning moral objectivity, as he considers that appealing to the logic advanced by seemingly impartial deontological or consequentialist philosophical perspectives allows agents to veil their subjectively determined aims within deceptive rational language. He views such appeals as characteristic of modernity wherein moral fictions are deployed to ‘close off shared deliberation about means to ends, or to close debates, or to disqualify opponents from shared deliberation’ (Lutz, 2012, 99). This he sees as the ‘emotivism’ that has prevailed since the Enlightenment Project sought a rational apologetic for the received moral traditions of a Christian worldview. To this end, MacIntyre’s analysis of modern ethical philosophy leads him to conclude that appeals to objective methods of moral rationality constitute what Nietzsche identified as a ‘will to power’ in the desire to manipulate others. Thus, MacIntyre is empathetic with the plight of the secular ethicist who despondent with the veiled arbitrariness of post-Enlightenment morality opts for Nietzschean nihilism. However, while understanding this conclusion, MacIntyre is not supportive of it. Instead he infers that such a Nietzschean view ultimately results in a moral permissivism equally as problematic as the emotivism against which it is addressed. His solution is to stretch the moral gaze beyond the philosophical justification for the rules of modern ethical conduct and reconsider the purposes those rules serve as guides for human action. In this way, MacIntyre finds a path out of the moral wasteland in the work of Aristotle and his concern with ‘purpose’.

For Aristotle, purpose or *telos* was determined communally within a received yet dynamically evolving tradition. In this sense, what MacIntyre advances is an action-centred ‘social teleology’ (Lutz, 2012, 108). For him, this social teleology is given expression through ‘practice’, which is defined inter-subjectively within an historically situated community. In modern liberal democracies where the governance of a community’s spatial interface is frequently channelled through the evolving traditions of planning, this focus on communally derived justifications for planning activity is particularly relevant in exploring the purposes that practitioners believe such activity *ought* to serve and how planning and allied practitioners can identify these purposes. In this sense, MacIntyre’s thesis resonates with the ‘Communities of Practice’ theory advanced by Wenger (1998). Here, a community of practice is defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership of a community ‘implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people’ (Wenger, 2012, 1). Such a domain is most often conceived as a specific professional activity, such as spatial planning (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). However, it may also include interactions by a range of agents whose activities are orientated around a particular issue of concern (Schweitzer, et al., 2008). ‘Activities around this common domain may include critiquing existing practice, developing innovative approaches, or imparting traditional practices to new members’ (Goldstein and Butler, 2010, 240). As a practice-based learning and concept dissemination theory (Blackmore, 2010; Wenger, 1998), a community of practice is not simply equated with a community of interest. Rather, ‘members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems – in short a shared ‘practice’ (Wenger, 2012, 2).



In MacIntyre's social teleology, the idea of a communally defined 'practice' is central to the relevance of Aristotelian philosophy for modern moral conduct. Thus, he offers a detailed definition of 'practice':

*By a "practice" I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (MacIntyre, 1984, 187)*

How the degree of complexity and level of social cooperation defines an activity as a practice is illustrated by MacIntyre when noting that, 'Planting turnips is not a practice; farming is' (MacIntyre, 1984, 187). However, MacIntyre has generated some confusion on what constitutes a practice by also specifying activities such as 'football' and 'chess' as practices. This has provoked criticism of his definition of a practice as being too simplistic to adequately reflect the political complexity of activities such as education (Carr, 2003) and nursing (Holland, 2010). This criticism seems equally applicable to planning as a complex and inherently political activity. Indeed, as noted by (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012, 1),

*Planning as an activity that attempts to manage spatial change would not exist in any meaningful way if it was not for contention over the future use and development of land. Spatial planning is owned by everyone who has a vested interest in the land and what happens to it.*

By conceiving planning in this way, it may first appear doubtful that planning corresponds to the idea of a practice advanced by MacIntyre. Moreover, it is uncertain that there are

discernible ‘internal goods’ of planning that can be orientated relative to identifiable ‘standards of excellence’. Nevertheless, by retracing the steps through which MacIntyre builds his concept of a practice, it is possible to appreciate how planning conforms to his definition of a practice.

MacIntyre supplies a varied array of practice examples. Among others, these include architecture, the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology, as well as the work of the historian (MacIntyre, 1984, 187). Characterising each of these practices is a level of social cooperation in their history, current state and future development. Thus, how these practices have emerged, are exercised and will evolve is consequent on the deliberations and actions of the community of practice engaged with the goal directed activity of managing ‘spatial change’ that gives the members of that community their sense of shared identity. In such communities there is likely to be a range of agents with a spectrum of views. This is especially pertinent to a complex activity such as planning which ‘is owned by everyone who has a vested interest in the land and what happens to it’. Furthermore, as ‘an activity that attempts to manage spatial change’, the activity of planning interacts with and at times may encompass a range of practices, such as architecture, the enquiries of biology and even the work of the historian to name just those identified by MacIntyre. Thus, planning is an intrinsically political endeavour practiced by politicians and a community of planners working with communities of allied practitioners and the broader public to mediate between and order practices. This poses the question as to how these practices should be ordered. Murphy addresses the issue of such political activity when concluding,

*There is a range of excellences that are necessary for answering this question well, and there is a range of capacities that are developed through successive attempts to answer these questions in common. An*

*adequate explication of these excellences and the developed capacities, and of the worthwhile activity engaged in by those attempting to answer this question, cannot be offered except in terms of the activity itself. There are internal goods to the activity of attempting to answer questions about how the practices in a community's life are to be ordered. This activity is, therefore, a practice.* (Murphy, 2003, 163)

In this sense, planning is a complex 'second-order' practice characterised by social cooperation wherein its goods are those of deliberation about, mediation between, and the sorting of first-order practices. The standards of excellence against which this practice is judged are defined by 'everyone who has a vested interest in the land and what happens to it'. For this reason, the standards of excellence against which planning practice is evaluated are dynamic rather than static as the performance of planning is referenced to the ongoing evolution of perceptions on how successful planning activity is in 'managing spatial change'. Hence, the standards of excellence against which planning practice is assessed are the aspirations for proper conduct and desired outcomes relative to the prevailing paradigm(s) in which it operates or to those new paradigms gaining widespread traction in planning activity, even if not yet dominating debate and action within planning's community of practice (Allmendinger, 2009; Hall and Tewdwr-Jones, 2010). Consequently, the politically infused practice of planning resonates with MacIntyre's historical reference for his particular conception of practice:

*In the ancient and medieval worlds the creation and sustaining of human communities – of households, cities, nations – is generally taken to be a practice in the sense in which I have defined it.*  
(MacIntyre, 1984, 187-188)

MacIntyre stresses that an activity engaged in for primarily 'external goods', such as the reward of status or material gain, does not amount to a practice, although receiving such a reward does not preclude an activity from being considered a practice (MacIntyre, 1988, 35). A practice is thereby 'moral-political' (Schwandt, 2005, 330) in character as it is largely defined by a self-referential definition of purpose beyond the instrumentalism pursuit of rewards other than the satisfaction of advancing practice excellence. Consequently, one's 'motivation' is a key issue in defining what counts as a practice. Lutz (2012, 157) usefully notes that,

*Practices have four distinctive characteristics: (1) People pursue the practice because they want to, because it addresses some need or desire they have by providing certain goods. (2) A practice has internal goods. There are things that can be gained only through participation in the practice, and it is the pursuit of these goods that leads to true excellence in the practice...(3) A practice has standards of excellence that develop along with the practice. (4) The success of the practice depends on the moral character of its practitioners.*

How practices become identifiable through their manifestation in the day-to-day work of practitioners is not always clear from MacIntyre's exposition. In this respect, Green (2009) offers some guidance. He suggests that it is useful to conceive of practices as three distinct but interrelated categories, namely 'activity', 'experience' and 'context' (Green, 2009, 7). Referencing Polkinghorne, (2004, 7), 'activity' is here interpreted as 'action directed towards accomplishing a goal'. The form this activity takes and the goal it is oriented towards achieving is influenced by how practitioners negotiate the constraints of context in drawing on their experiences. To a large extent, the contexts wherein such activity takes place and experiences are formed are the institutions which give material effect to, and influence the

evolution of practices. As noted by MacIntyre (1984, 94), ‘no practices could survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions’. These institutions transmit the knowledge and standards of the practice through space and time. Thus,

*To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point.* (MacIntyre, 1984, 194)

Consequently, to engage in a practice is to engage with the traditions of that practice. While there is an enduring quality to such traditions, MacIntyre is keen to stress that a tradition is ‘an argument extended through time’ (MacIntyre, 1988, 12), that evolves as practitioners pursue excellence in their practice, not by rejecting and starting over again, but ‘through criticism and invention’ (MacIntyre, 1984, 222). In this sense, the very activity of a practice involves advancing the standards of excellence in a tradition by drawing on one’s experience to improve both the traditions itself and the institutional contexts that sustain a practice (Halliday and Johnsson, 2010). Therefore, ‘it is important to assert that “context” needs to be thought of as *part of practice*, as inscribed in it, as part of its larger and more adequate conceptualisation’ (Green, 2009, 8).

MacIntyre’s concern with ‘tradition’ has drawn criticism, with one observer noting that ‘it may be MacIntyre’s special distinction to strike half his readers as an old-fashioned universalizing metaphysician (since he defends a version of tradition and teleology) while striking the other half as a dangerous relativist (since he offers a radically pluralist concept of moral practices)’ (Higgins, 2003, 279-280). In the case of the latter allegation, it appears that MacIntyre does indeed conceive a relativistic approach to moral philosophy (Miller, 1994; Mosteller, 2008), although he qualifies this with the view that questioning the relativity

of the perspectives held by a tradition can help reform that tradition. In holding that there is no neutral position from which to assess the limitations of a tradition, he argues for the contextual awareness of one's situated perspective when evaluating different traditions against the norms of our own, and in doing so, allowing such alternate traditions raise questions in our own tradition (Lutz, 2012, 178). In this way, revision and reform is facilitated. As noted by MacIntyre,

*Rationality, understood within some particular tradition...requires qua rationality a recognition that the rational inadequacies of that tradition from its own point of view...may at any time prove to be such that perhaps only the resources provided by some other quite alien tradition...will enable us to identify and to understand the limitations of our own tradition...* (MacIntyre, 1989, 201)

With respect to the contention that MacIntyre is an 'old-fashioned universalizing metaphysician', Martha Nussbaum has accused him of longing 'nostalgically for a unanimity that human life has never really had' and seeking 'to sink into the embrace of an authority...that will give us order at the price of reason' (Nussbaum, 7 December 1989). This charge is centred on MacIntyre's opinion that the instrumentalism and liberal individualism he sees as pervasive in modern society is deficient in the collective conceptual perspectives necessary to resolve social questions about morality and his advocacy of a return to an Aristotelian idea of 'virtue' as an alternative to the contemporary dominance of managerialism in social activity (Lutz, 2009). MacIntyre has countered this by contending that it 'seems to result not from a misunderstanding, but from a careless misreading of the text [*After Virtue*]' (MacIntyre, 2007, xi). It is in this context, that Lutz (2012) defends MacIntyre by noting how 'to construct the nostalgic critique, it is necessary to conflate what MacIntyre calls the Aristotelian tradition of the virtues, with the "Aristotelian virtues" or

“traditional virtues”, or to identify the tradition of the virtues with traditional morality’ (180). Thus, what MacIntyre advances is not Aristotelian virtues but rather the Aristotelian project of searching for a means to conceive what a virtue may be. He believes that this search was eclipsed by the Enlightenment Project’s focus on the rule following of consequentialist and deontological ethics. Ultimately, MacIntyre concludes that it is the desire to advance the excellence *of* an evolving practice tradition through excellence *in* practice that constitutes the *telos* or purpose of a practice as it is instantiated as action in a specific context. However, it is only through the pursuit of such excellence that purpose can be realised. In this sense, ‘the *telos* is both partially known and unknown, and in the quest for the unknown, we also refine our understanding of the known’ (Beadle and Moore, 2006, 332). MacIntyre conceives this goal-directed nature of practice as a ‘quest’ and those motivations which support this quest as ‘virtues’;

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

MacIntyre conceives this sense of a quest as reflected in ‘the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life’ (1984, 218). This goal-directed narrative unity prompts reflection-‘in’-action, reflection-‘on’-action and reflection-‘for’-action as one seeks practice excellence through experience-informed activity. Consequently, ‘questions of how to act are, at least in part, questions of how to live out the narrative in terms of which one’s life is defined. ‘What should I do?’ is answered by considering ‘Who am I?’’ (Weaver, 2006, 344). An essential dimension of such a narrative is the relationship between one’s experiences, the current

context, and a desired future. Thus, there is an inherent temporal dimension to this ‘quest’ (MacIntyre, 1984, 219) for practice excellence, as past, present and future are purposefully organised. Hence, ‘as an agent sees some goal in the future that is to be pursued through present action, that goal serves as the *telos* for that person’s acts’ (Lutz, 2012, 124). However, MacIntyre does not detail how his theory of a practice-focused quest can be applied in the daily life of individuals other than to cryptically conclude that, ‘the life spent seeking for the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is’ (MacIntyre, 1984, 219). Nevertheless, help here can be found in the work of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and his hermeneutical approach to the role of narrative.

Whereas MacIntyre finds inspiration for comprehensions of *telos* in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Ricoeur draws on Aristotle’s *Poetics*. This Aristotelian influence centres on the concept of ‘*mythos*’, which is most frequently translated as ‘emplotment’. For Aristotle, what a plot introduces is the provision of causality to an otherwise succession of seemingly random events. In this sense, emplotment permits narrative production by organising events in time. Ultimately, the provision of a plot, ““grasps together” and integrates into one whole and complete story multiple and scattered events, thereby schematising the intelligible signification attached to the narrative as a whole’ (Ricoeur, 1984, x). Thus, plot serves a teleological role by linking events into a narrative that determines causality and the purpose of actions. Consequently, how an agent constructs the narrative of their practice reflects how they interpret and invest purposeful meanings in their actions. For both MacIntyre and Ricoeur, finding purpose is achieved through the work of interpreting our activities as narratives set within particular contexts. However, while MacIntyre’s narrative ‘quest’ concerns an evolving practice tradition extended *through* time, Ricoeur’s focus is on how



purpose is realised by emplotment *with* time. It is this temporal dimension of Ricoeur's approach to emplotment that offers promise in addressing the 'application deficit' of MacIntyre's work.

Key to understanding Ricoeur's approach is his concern with the disproportion between the time of narration, or the time taken to explain oneself, and the duration of events in the story being told. This tension is consequent of how the construction of a narrative creates an internal temporality wherein certain events are elaborated and some ignored disproportionate to the measurable time taken for them to occur. Thus, the internal temporality of a narrative is subjectively or inter-subjectively produced as causality is specified through the unfolding chronology of the story that is related. This narrative time creates a sense of direction as events are ordered into a structure of unfolding significance. Through this process, the events and entities of a narrative are purposefully arranged as the *telos* of the story is disclosed. By constructing narratives of the self, an agent thereby identifies significance in their practice activity as they explain how experience was/is drawn on to negotiate the conditions of context. This process of narrating one's unfinished self by ordering significance up through a 'sense-making spiral' (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2012, 55) from past, present and concern for the future, induces an on-going 'sense of ending' (Kermode, 1967) as the purpose of one's continually evolving practice unfolds through explaining 'how' and 'why' one moved from 'there' to 'here'.

Having thus detailed a framework for conceiving purpose and outlined a theory for how this can be explored, the next section seeks to illustrate the benefit of this approach. This is undertaken by examining a practitioner's narrative that was constructed and conveyed during a two hour interview in the offices of Fingal County Council in July 2011. The purpose of

the interview was to try to better understand why and how the interviewee chose to advocate a planning concept called ‘green infrastructure’. The detailed telling of this interview facilitates close attention to the way an autobiographical narrative offers insight into how a practitioner can come to find purpose in their practice, and through locating such purpose, change that practice. Thus, this interview illustrates the ‘world-building’ role of storytelling (Polanyi, 1985). As noted by (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2006, 320),

*Storytellers recreate their world as they see it and as they want to represent it to others. These recreations are not photographically accurate accounts of events and people...stories are not facts or evidence waiting for interpretation; they are, from the moment they are conceived through their many telling and retellings, the embodiment of the storyteller’s interpretations.*

In this sense, self-understanding through narrative is an intrinsically subjective project that requires greater thoroughness than normal on the part of the researcher in recounting the story told so as not to eclipse the unfolding meaning-making processes that invests the narrative with significance. Hence, the interview described below seeks to emulate a form of ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) in interview presentation rather than the more familiar presentation of a greater number but less detailed series of interviews. This method is specifically chosen for the depth required to demonstrate the hermeneutical merit of the MacIntyre-Ricouer framework in granting ‘access’ (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006, 115) to the inherently subjective narrative processes of self-interpretation within a practice tradition. Accordingly, this interview serves to ‘illustrate’ the interpretive benefits of this framework in furnishing depth of understanding about how an agent conceives purpose in their practice rather than seeking to empirically ‘prove’ the existence of generalisable causal relationships via the identification of patterns across a sample of interviews.

## **Purpose *in* Practice**

Deployment of the green infrastructure (GI) concept has significantly increased over the past decade (Thomas and Littlewood, 2010; Wright, 2011). While the origin of the term remains debatable (Allen, 2012; Pankhurst, 2012; Roe and Mell, 2013; Rouse and Bunster-Ossa, 2013), and there are a variety of interpretations as to what it entails (Cameron, et al., 2012; EC, 2012; Ellis, 2012), virtually all understandings resonate with the frequently referenced definition advanced by Benedict and McMahon (2006, 1) as, ‘an interconnected network of natural areas and other open spaces that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions...and provides a wide array of benefits for people and wildlife’. Although largely unknown among the Irish planning fraternity prior to November 2008, the GI concept has since enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity among spatial planners and allied practitioners. Indeed, over the course of just three years, from 2008 to 2011, the concept moved from obscurity to frequent reference in Irish land use policy at national, regional and local levels. Most planning and allied practitioners in Ireland identify Fingal County Council (FCC) as the initiating source and one of the principal advocates behind GI’s ascension to prominence. Furthermore, it is widely held among such practitioners that Dr Gerry Clabby, an ecologist and FCC’s Heritage Officer<sup>ii</sup>, has been the key champion of GI both within the council and in the Irish planning system more generally (author, forthcoming).

In relaying his reasons for advocating GI planning, Dr Clabby constructs a narrative of discovery wherein his efforts to promote a GI approach convey an unfolding quest to advance the practice of planning. This narrative weaves a structure of significance by emplotting events in a teleological movement towards disclosure of how better planning practice was

discovered and given representation. To Dr Clabby, this story begins with his training as an ecologist and his subsequent university lecturing career. As noted by Dr Clabby,

*I suppose when you come in later on into somewhere like a Council, you bring whatever you have with you, and you are more likely to articulate it clearly. Like part of the reason I wanted to get out of academia was that I wanted to be involved with somewhere where I was 'doing', trying to influence conservation or that agenda in reality, rather than lecturing other people about how you might do it.*

Through this statement, Dr Clabby furnishes a concise explanation of how his personal quest for better planning practice began. This involves a reflection on how his motivation 'to influence' practice prompted him to leave academia for local authority employment. This departure point establishes the goal-orientated direction for the quest and specifies the teleological structure within which the disclosure of succeeding narrative events will be causally arranged. Having thus established the motivation for setting out on this journey we are then introduced to the 'storyworld' within which this narrative is set:

*Each of us [Heritage Officers] have created our own role in some ways, because there was no template for this job, like when I came here there wasn't a Heritage Officer, so you just create your own role I suppose, which gives you great freedom in some ways.*

While this 'freedom' provides the positive backdrop to this unfolding narrative, we are shortly introduced to the degraded setting within which the landscape of planning practice is to be found;

*We figured out where to put residential stuff, where to put commercial things, where to put roads, where to put everything and then if there's*

*any green stuff left over, well sure we'll have a bit of that for a park.*

*And I just don't think – that's not good enough!*

This failure to adequately consider 'green stuff' (nature) is cogently identified as a deficiency in the tradition of planning practice. In this way, a practice deficiency is posed as the challenge which animates the narrative by helping to calibrate the goal-orientated direction of the quest. Thus, there occurs an implicit teleological movement from 'trying to influence conservation' to knowing what must be addressed. Consequently, we are presented with an explanation of 'why' the search for better practice was initiated. The account of 'how' a means to remedy this practice deficiency was discovered and promoted complements this explanation in synergistically working to propel the narrative forward by suggesting disclosure of how better practice was realised. This injection of future-straining motion is given impetus by emplotment with the first clearly discernible narrative event. This is when Dr Clabby presents his recollections of initially encountering the GI concept;

*How I came across this concept was when I came here first...they were doing the development plan at the time...and [my] first job was to write the natural heritage chapter for the development plan and I was googling things and I found this green infrastructure paper by Benedict and McMahon...the thing that attracted me about it was that it made sense, it was a language that seemed to me to make sense to the likes of engineers and planners...to me, nature conservation people were just not talking a language that other people understood, so their [Benedict and McMahon] whole notion of development and conservation going hand-in-hand seemed to me to be absolutely the way to go.*

In recalling how the GI concept ‘made sense’ in the context of ‘trying to influence conservation’ by remedying a deficient practice tradition, Dr Clabby begins to thread together the ‘why’ and the ‘how’ of the narrative. This is achieved while simultaneously infusing the quest with the lure of a reward – the realisation of an improved practice tradition through GI planning. This teleological progress is given additional momentum by the subsequent identification and portrayal of an important event that drives the quest forward. As recalled by Dr Clabby,

*Another really big thing was...there was a study tour for two days in the Netherlands looking at their Ecological Structure Plan...and I was really impressed by that. Particularly what I was really impressed by was their nature conservation policy [that] at the time was called ‘Nature for People, People for Nature’. I just felt that putting people at the centre of that was really good. Something that we weren’t doing at all. And I felt, well look that’s the ‘green infrastructure’ idea as well, even though they don’t call it that, but that is what it is. I was very impressed by their thinking...I got excited about it and thought ‘we can do that. Why don’t we do it!’*

Here, Dr Clabby employs the internal temporality of the narrative to highlight and elaborate on what he deems a meaningful event. The temporal disproportion allocated this event relative to other incidents not mentioned<sup>iii</sup> or only cursorily alluded to, consolidates the emplotment of the narrative by reinforcing the unfolding structure of significance determining the emerging profile and rationale of the story being told. This fortifies the narrative’s teleological movement by organising its various entities and events into an autobiographical account of the emerging discovery of purpose in professional practice. Of particular note is how this encounter with a planning system that was perceived to be

advancing a better model of practice provides what Chatman terms a ‘kernal’ (1980, 53-56) or essential event that forms a turning point in the narrative. Here, the narrative moves from reflection to action with Dr Clabby’s role shifting from observant participant to guiding contributor as the quest swings from description to deed. Specifically, at this juncture Dr Clabby decides to confront the challenge of transforming the practice tradition of Irish planning. According to MacIntyre, it is this yearning to progress the excellence *of* an evolving practice tradition by promoting excellence *in* practice that represents the *telos* or purpose of that practice. It is only through the pursuit of such excellence that this telos can be realised. For Dr Clabby, this telos was mediated by his experiences in, and knowledge of the institutional context that influence the evolution of planning practices. Such experiences and context sensitivity fashioned his approach to advocacy, as opportunity was sought to promote the GI planning approach. As he recalls, this opportunity was found in the provisions of the Council’s heritage plan,

*We had a thing in the heritage plan saying we had to have a major conference every few years. So I thought well let’s have a conference. For a while I was going to call it green spaces and green this, [but] eventually I took the courage of my convictions and said no, we’ll call it ‘green infrastructure’, even though no one knew what it meant.*

This conference was well attended by a cohort of planning and allied practitioners, and is commonly regarded by such practitioners as pivotal in the dissemination of the GI concept within the Irish planning system (author, forthcoming). It is similarly regarded as a ‘kernal event’ in Dr Clabby’s quest to pursue better planning practice. As he recounts,

*People turned around after the conference and said ‘well let’s do this in the new development plan’. Just like that – bang! I didn’t have to do anything else; that was the end of that discussion. I had been*

*saying we should do something about green infrastructure in the new development plan, but after the conference people just went 'yeah right absolutely'. There was no argument about it...which was great.*

Sustaining the narrative's teleological movement, Dr Clabby promotes forward motion by again employing temporal disproportion of the unfolding narrative. However, in contrast to the temporal extension concerning his experiences in The Netherlands or his description of the conference, this time he compresses a number of events and presents them fleetingly as supplementary details. This is illustrated by his portrayal of a range of advocacy work he engaged in subsequent to the conference:

*I kept at it, like I wrote things or I talked to people or if people asked me to give a talk I did it. And I suppose because I had a background in lecturing, I was happy to do all that stuff.*

Here, the use of temporal disproportion conversely to how it was employed when discussing The Netherlands and the conference, serves to advance the narrative *in* measurable (normal) time. However, more importantly for the narrative's emerging structure of significance, it also controls *the internal* time of the narrative and so reinforces the emphasis given to The Netherlands and the conference as 'kernel' events in the quest for an improved practice tradition. Simultaneously, the expression, 'I kept at it' supports the sense of commitment to this quest and a continued desire to advance better practice. From here, Dr Clabby's narrative focus transits from an autobiography of significant events concerning 'how' he came to view and advocate GI, to a greater concern with the 'idea of planning' (Campbell, 2012). This is conveyed by his reflections on the purpose of planning when declaring that,

*...ultimately I think it's nothing more, any of this, than decent planning. Like is good planning not about figuring out what you have and documenting it, figuring out what you want and then figuring out*



*a way to get from A to B. Is that not good planning, is that not evidence based planning. That's what it's about, isn't it, good planning has always been about that. So I don't really think green infrastructure is this new radical idea, I think it's just good planning.*

Having now constructed and conveyed a narrative around discovering and advocating GI in a quest for better practice, Dr Clabby here concludes that the model of 'decent planning' is given effect through the GI approach. To him, GI is perceived not as a 'new radical idea' but rather as 'just good planning'. In this way, the GI approach is presented as representing what 'good planning has always been about', and as such, is interpreted as the recovery of planning's purpose. This power of narrative to 'reconfigure' (Ricoeur, 1984) our understanding, not only improves comprehension of the practice, but also one's position within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). This is portrayed by Dr Clabby's reflection on how GI allows him to be positioned positively within the Council's community of planning and allied practitioners;

*I can't work in an environment where I'm seen as an impediment. I need people to think that I'm a positive, and the green infrastructure thing allows you to do that...I refuse to be on the ground where I'm a problem all the time. I don't want to be on that ground. That's not a good place to be. So I want to be on the ground where I'm solving the problem, not where I'm stopping someone doing something creative.*

In this sense, GI is interpreted as a means to negotiate the potential for conflict within Council's community of planning and allied practitioners by pre-emptively diffusing disagreement. The interviewee believes that GI facilitates this by favourably repositioning his nature conservation concerns relative to those of the other practitioners he engages with. This interlacing of introspection on a desired position within his practice community and how

the GI planning approach facilitates this, presents the realisation of the quest's personal dimension to positively influence the evolution of planning practice. In this way, 'criticism and intervention' (MacIntyre, 1984, 222) in the tradition of planning to prompt better practice culminates in greater awareness of his purpose as a practitioner. This self-discovery is subsequently threaded through an enlightened appreciation of the conservation agenda he set out to influence;

*The whole nature conservation is totally changed. It's now about eco-system services. We've moved into a different place. It's not just about making sure everything is ok and we're not damaging it. So I think the green infrastructure paradigm or eco-system services paradigm is about how we continue to provide these viable functions for society while doing what we need to do.*

These last three quotations constitute the climax of the narrative and the culmination of the quest. This centres on a three-fold move that portrays: (1) how through the identification and retrieval of planning's lapsed purpose, the true purpose of planning is revealed; (2) how in locating the true purpose of planning, one's purpose as a practitioner is realised; and (3) how the practice tradition of nature conservation has evolved as a reflection of (1) and (2). Thus, it is at this point that the purpose (telos) of the narrative and the purpose (telos) of the practice coalesce as the full disclosure of one reveals the other. Tying all this together is an autobiographical narrative of GI's discovery and advocacy. In this way, a dialectic of explaining and understanding through narrative construction offers a means by which a purpose-filled interpretation is forged to account for 'how' and 'why' one moved from 'there' to 'here'.

## **Practice *with* Purpose**

For an autobiographical narrator, the story being told is inherently imbued with ethical judgement as values and beliefs shape the structure of significance which gives the narrative its form. This reflects Ricoeur's concern with the role of temporal disproportion in facilitating the unfolding telos of a narrative. This is because, 'when narrative time has become predominantly a time of concern, moral or ethical significance will normally come to override bare succession – that is, events occurring in mere temporal sequence – in the narrated world' (Dowling, 2011, 48). Thus, attention to the way we tell stories about what we do may help reveal our ethical positions as 'situated knowers' (Yanow, 1996, 27) thinking and acting from particular perspectives that are informed by traditions embedded within communities of practice. To allocate such attention is not simply to engage in self-obsessed introspection. Rather, by reflecting on the purpose of our practice we confront the very 'idea of planning' (Campbell, 2012). Accordingly, we engage with the difficult issue of justifying 'why' we do 'what' we do the 'way' we do it. In this manner, narrative construction facilitates reasoning on what *ought* to be done and *why*. Consequently, reflecting through narrative on how we have acted or should act is a profoundly normative endeavour. By employing experiences to inform context sensitive activity, this form of reflection thus helps to shape the direction of present and future engagement with the practice.

Consequently, narrative introspection supplies a form of reasoning that practitioners can draw upon to determine what should be done; a form of reasoning that Aristotle termed 'practical reasoning'. This form of reasoning differs from the 'practical reasoning' of the phronetic planning perspective by broadening concern beyond reflection on power differentials towards a more encompassing understanding of how one's identity is given moral purpose through seeking to advance excellence in one's actions. For Aristotle, practical and moral reasoning

are not discrete forms of reasoning, but rather constitute two sides of the same coin. This is because practical reasoning, although focused on how to achieve a given aim, is ultimately informed by questions concerning what that aim should be and how it should be achieved by means of moral reasoning. Therefore, the aims that are perceived as choice worthy are identified as such by means of reasoning on what counts as 'worthy'. It is this duality in Aristotelian practical reasoning that MacIntyre conceives in his definition of a 'practice' and then seeks to elicit in his call for a turn to practice.

Importantly, both the aims to be achieved by such a practice and the means deemed appropriate to achieving these aims are established by the traditions of a community of practice. Thus, practical reasoning involves a dialectical engagement with the moral-practical traditions of a community as it seeks to reflect, review and revise the constitution of that tradition. Consequently, practical reasoning is a form of reasoning informed by, influencing and extending the tradition in which it is embedded. Although, practical reasoning is influenced by the tradition of a community of practice, it deals with managing instances of moral-practical engagement through practical activities. Coherence to these activities is provided by channelling, extending and reshaping the tradition via narrating our activities as part of a 'quest' to achieve better practice. Accordingly, the reflective function of self-narration organises personal and professional identity in the context of a community's tradition and the practices of those who are aligned to it. As noted by MacIntyre, 'I can only ask "What am I to do?" if I can answer the prior question, "Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?" (MacIntyre, 1984, 216). In this way, seeking to advance better practice through our practical reasoning as part of a broader self-narrative understanding 'helps to integrate disparate elements of human experience into a more or less coherent whole' (McAdams, 1999, 3). This is illustrated for example in how Dr Clabby reads back

significance and a sense of unity into his experiences by constructing an auto-biographical narrative that explains the coherent teleological progression of his practice from that grounded in an ineffective tradition to a better, 'new paradigm' of practice. This is achieved by altering normal and narrative time in chronologically organising the interpretation of his experiences as a lecturer, a new entrant to the local authority system, as a heritage officer, his trip to The Netherlands and his subsequent GI advocacy. This narrative ordering supplies coherency to his identity and clarity of purpose to his activity by suppressing a sense of arbitrariness and infusing an impression of teleological progress that upon backward reading renders events as an uncomplicated narrative. In doing so, this process ignores events and entities not deemed significant to the situated and current teleological interpretation given to one's history, present and future direction. This powerful meaning-making process may thereby erroneously portray a straightforward trajectory as it is through the sense of clarity supplied by such a narrative that self-intelligibility and lucidity of direction are furnished.

Is this then a way of conceiving 'morally superior' activity? Probably not! Rather, it is a way of understanding how agents interpret their practice as they strive to improve the tradition in which it is embedded. As such, it is a hermeneutically informed approach to understanding practitioner's interpretations of the purposes of their planning activity instead of the more metaphysical perspectives on planning ethics advanced by Habermasian inspired modes of collaborative planning or the Foucaultian infused objective of phronetic planning to temper power asymmetries. Therefore, this paper does not proclaim a 'better' means to determine what ought to be done. Instead, it endeavours to furnish a more nuanced understanding of how, why and with what effect those involved in planning practice negotiate the 'inherent uncertainty, complexity and inevitable normatively' of a world brim full of 'wicked problems' in determining what *they* believe ought to be done. It is about how

practitioners *seek* to facilitate better practice, not necessarily how better practice *is* achieved. As such, this paper does not venture to renounce and replace the fruitful contributions of collaborative or phronetic planning perspectives. Instead, the approach presented here endeavours to complement both, while concurrently extending their contributions. This is achieved by refocusing the debate from establishing *a priori* formulas for moral engagement towards an *in situ* conversation with the complexities of wicked problems wherein the dialectic of practice involves context sensitive reasoning that dynamically reflects and reforms a tradition as it engages with difficult questions on determining what ought to be done ‘here’ and ‘now’. Therefore, this approach does not begin with asking ‘how I advance collaborative working’ or ‘how do I ensure that no voice is marginalised’ as objectives that are universally applicable to all planning activity. Instead, it first asks, ‘*why in this situation do I believe it is best to advance collaborative working*’ or ‘*why in this situation do I believe it is best to ensure that no voice is marginalised*’.

In this sense, the approach advanced in this paper is concerned with how practitioners engage with the ‘art of situated ethical judgement’ (Campbell, 2006) in confronting live situations through the interpretive tools supplied them by the tradition of their practice community. Hence, this paper’s interpretive approach advances the idea that through attention to the narrative of our practice we may develop a ‘knowing practice’ (Kemmis, 2005, 421) which is alert to how our knowledge of the world is influence by and changed through our engagement with our practice. It is through this ‘knowing’ that practitioners may achieve insight into both the purpose of their practice and their purpose as practitioners. Such a ‘knowing practice’ is especially pertinent to planning which often has significant implications for people and the environment. In many respects, planning constitutes ‘a series of statements about what we take to be right or wrong and what we take to represent the highest priorities of the society in

which the planning is undertaken' (Wachs, 1995, xii). However, as noted by Campbell (2002, 285), 'It is planning's interface with action that gives it its edge; for understanding without implication of action is hollow of meaning, even self-indulgent, while action without understanding is partial'. Seeing the duality of practical reasoning in the quest for practice excellence suggests that 'ethics is not simply speculative activity, a narrative of thoughts and concepts about hypothetical situations but an explication by doing, a practical application of competences that can be learning only if you are able (and available) to test them in practical experience' (Lo Piccolo and Thomas 2008, 11-12). What this paper has sought to demonstrate is that through sincere critical involvement with the traditions of our practice, we can reshape both the purpose of that practice as we simultaneously come realise our purpose as ethically responsible practitioners. It is the practical reasoning that is given teleological coherency through self-narration that mediates between such practices and the traditions in which we are embedded.

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<sup>i</sup> For a good example of this single subject interview approach in planning theory and policy analysis, see Forester, J., 2012 "Learning to Improve Practice: Lessons from Practice Stories and Practitioners' Own Discourse Analyses (or Why Only the Loons Show Up)", *Planning Theory & Practice* 13(1) 11-26.

<sup>ii</sup> The role of the 'Heritage Officer' within local authorities commenced as a pilot programme in 1999, and subsequently expanding to include twenty seven officers, each located in a different local planning authority. The heritage officer programme aims to ensure the presence of heritage expertise within the local governance system. Working on a broad definition of 'heritage', these officers help coordinate and provide input to numerous council activities ranging from natural environmental issues through to landscape and archaeology, as well as built and cultural heritage matters. As such, their activities frequently interact with the local planning policy development process.

<sup>iii</sup> For example, the effort expended on scheduling meetings to facilitate his absence from Ireland or the journey to and from The Netherlands.