

Spatial Planning and the New Localism

Edited by
Graham Houghton and Phil Allmendinger



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This book assesses the transition from New Labour's 'Spatial Planning' approach to the Coalition government's preferred 'Localism' approach. Localism, we are told, will liberate local planners from the heavy hand of central government and allow planning to flourish at the local level. Alternatively, nation-wide austerity cuts mean that planning faces cuts. In just two years, the machinery of regional planning has been dismantled and local authorities are being asked to do more with less. Innovation is also evident, however, notably with the introduction of neighbourhood planning and Local Enterprise Partnerships. This collection contains chapters looking at the planning system overall with a focus on factors such as sustainability and planning, new approaches to infrastructure planning and the critical interface between urban policy, local economic development and planning.

This book was published as a special issue of *Planning, Practice and Research*. It also contains a brand new afterword written by the editors.

Graham Haughton is Professor of Urban and Environmental Planning, University of Manchester.

Phil Allmendinger is a Fellow of Clare College and Professor of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge.

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Contents

[Citation Information](#)

[1. Introduction: Spatial Planning and the New Localism](#)

Graham Haughton & Phil Allmendinger

[2. The Evolution and Trajectories of English Spatial Governance: 'Neoliberal' Episodes in Planning](#)

Phil Allmendinger & Graham Haughton

[3. The Greenest Government Ever? Planning and Sustainability in England after the May 2010 Elections](#)

Richard Cowell

[4. The New Contractualism, the Privatization of the Welfare State, and the Barriers to Open Source Planning](#)

Mike Raco

[5. Towards Post-political Consensus in Urban Policy? Localism and the Emerging Agenda for Regeneration Under the Cameron Government](#)

Iain Deas

[6. The Delusion of Strategic Spatial Planning: What's Left After the Labour Government's English Regional Experiment?](#)

Mark Baker & Cecilia Wong

[7. Rescaling of Planning and Its Interface with Economic Development](#)

Lee Pugalis & Alan Townsend

[8. The Remodeling of Decision Making on Major Infrastructure in Britain](#)

Tim Marshall

9. Neo-liberalization Processes and Spatial Planning in France, Germany, and the Netherlands: An Exploration

Bas Waterhout, Frank Othengrafen & Olivier Sykes

10. Afterword: Localism, Austerity and Planning

Graham Haughton & Phil Allmendinger

Index

Citation Information

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Chapter 1

Editorial: Spatial Planning and the New Localism

Graham Haughton & Phil Allmendinger

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 1–5

Chapter 2

*The Evolution and Trajectories of English Spatial Governance:
'Neoliberal' Episodes in Planning*

Phil Allmendinger & Graham Haughton

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 6–26

Chapter 3

*The Greenest Government Ever? Planning and Sustainability in England
after the May 2010 Elections*

Richard Cowell

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 27–44

Chapter 4

*The New Contractualism, the Privatization of the Welfare State, and the
Barriers to Open Source Planning*

Mike Raco

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 45–64

Chapter 5

Towards Post-political Consensus in Urban Policy? Localism and the Emerging Agenda for Regeneration Under the Cameron Government

Iain Deas

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 65–82

Chapter 6

The Delusion of Strategic Spatial Planning: What's Left After the Labour Government's English Regional Experiment?

Mark Baker & Cecilia Wong

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 83–103

Chapter 7

Rescaling of Planning and Its Interface with Economic Development

Lee Pugalís & Alan Townsend

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 104–121

Chapter 8

The Remodeling of Decision Making on Major Infrastructure in Britain

Tim Marshall

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 122–140

Chapter 9

Neo-liberalization Processes and Spatial Planning in France, Germany, and the Netherlands: An Exploration

Bas Waterhout, Frank Othengrafen & Olivier Sykes

Planning, Practice and Research, volume 28, issue 1 (February 2013)
pp. 141–159

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Spatial Planning and the New Localism

GRAHAM HAUGHTON & PHIL
ALLMENDINGER

Graham Haughton, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK.

Abstract

This special issue looks at spatial planning and the new localism, focusing on the recent changes to policy in England following the May 2010 elections when the Coalition government came to power. As Bas Waterhout, Frank Othengrafen and Olivier Sykes note in their contribution, changes in English planning seem to be more frequent and more dramatic than in many other European countries. Partly in consequence of this, planners and critics in other countries watch carefully the English experience for what they can learn about reforming planning systems.

It would be tempting to say this special issue appears at a critical time in the history of English planning, as fundamental reforms are being introduced which are reworking both the policy scope and the scales of planning. But actually, there have been several such moments in the past 30 years or so, as Phil Allmendinger and Graham Haughton demonstrate in the first of the substantive articles here, which looks at the ways in which new modes and motifs of neoliberal thinking have permeated each phase of planning restructuring since the late 1970s. It remains to be seen how significant the current changes will prove to be in changing the course of English planning practice, but they are certainly part of a pattern of repeated reform with various repackaged elements and arguments.

As Iain Deas notes in his discussion here of urban regeneration, ‘New Localism’ is not a new term—since the 1990s all incoming national governments have tended to talk about moving away from the centralizing instinct of central government and instead empowering local government or local communities (Haughton, 2012). Back in 1995 John Lovering provided a detailed critique of what he termed ‘New Localism’, in which he sets out a powerful argument for the way in which local success stories are converted to an almost anodyne recipe for national and local politicians wanting to build an argument that it was possible to restructure localities relatively painlessly to the demands of the emerging global economy. Drawing on a limited reading of the success stories such as high tech clusters in Silicon Valley, the M4 and M5 corridors in England, Emilia Romagna in Northern Italy and elsewhere, the redemptive powers of local activism and intervention were set out in an almost naïve way as providing possible solutions to complex, deeply entrenched problems of local and global inequalities. In this context, the current English government’s calls upon the redemptive powers of ‘localism’ begin to look to be part of a long-standing pattern, and to have at their heart a series of contradictions about how the promises and the limits of this approach.

Over the 20 years since Lovering’s (1995) argument, there have been repeated returns to the appeal of some form of localism, evident in the community economic development agenda of the EU for instance (Haughton, 1999) and in various documents produced under New Labour. The results have been far from clear-cut. In the early days of New Labour, for instance, we were promised that giving more power to the devolved nations (Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) and to the English regions would lead to a ‘double devolution dividend’, as power would continue to cascade down to local government. Instead much of the double devolution dividend went not to local authorities but to some of the ‘soft spaces’ of planning and regeneration introduced by New Labour, such as the meta-regional initiatives for the Northern Way and the Thames Gateway (Haughton *et al.*, 2010). The ‘open source’ approach to planning advocated by the Conservative Party in the run up to the 2010 election was scathing of the New Labour model, claiming that far from empowering local actors it was ‘top-down’, bureaucratic and reliant on an unwieldy and counterproductive target culture. Their new ‘New Localism’ would be different we were promised. With every new government for the past 20

years proclaiming its supposed allegiance to greater local empowerment and repudiation of past centralist approaches, it is hard not to be skeptical about the current claims that are being made about radical changes in approach. Such skepticism is not assuaged by the none-too-subtle criticisms of planning as a 'burden on business' by some in Government, the dusting off of repackaged initiatives such as enterprise zones and the deployment of centralizing and growth driven policies under a thin veneer of localism in the National Planning Policy Framework (House of Commons Communities and Local Government Committee, 2012).

In this special issue we have gathered together a range of authors to provide insights on different aspects of the planning process in recent years, analyzing both the legacy of New Labour and the new policy directions set out by the Coalition government. Richard Cowell takes the intersection of environmental sustainability, localism and planning as the starting point for his compelling critique of how planning has struggled to make a difference on this front, whilst pointing to some progress along the way. The picture he paints is of opportunities wasted but also of some substantive progress in providing opportunities at least for more informed and wider ranging debates about the trade-offs involved in reconciling development with the emerging environmental agenda.

Mark Baker and Cecilia Wong provide a detailed and nuanced analysis of how the more strategic dimensions of planning evolved in the past two decades, in particular the role of regional planning. This article again usefully highlights both the gains that emerged under New Labour's emerging thinking on planning, and some of its shortcomings. Chief among the gains appeared to be the move toward evidence based policy, which is one of the potential areas of loss under the Coalition government's proposals to reduce the 'burden' of planning, and to refocus it (yet again) on 'delivery', one of the motifs of the later period of New Labour planning reforms. Their analysis of the localization agenda for planning suggests that the localism trend may well lead to a strengthening of central direction, rather than a loosening of the prescriptive 'top-down' approach which it is ostensibly meant to replace. Likewise, the new government's scathing critique of the target culture of New Labour, which seemed to imply this approach to central control would become history, is already being tempered as the new government begins to grapple with the realities of the needs of the development industry for a clear and consistent planning

framework rather than local ‘freedom’, which in reality can become potentially quite anarchic.

One of the other notable features of planning in the UK in the past 20 years has been a growing concern to engage more effectively with infrastructure planning. This in part reflects a shift within neoliberalism, from earlier Thatcherite cuts to government capital spending to later approaches that have attempted to use both state and private finance to update the nation’s infrastructure as part of a broader approach to improving local and national competitiveness. Under both approaches, however, what was clear was that there was a compelling need to address the problems of infrastructure maintenance and ageing, and to address the needs of growing demand for new infrastructure, not least in IT, public transport, ports and airports. The result has been a period of what Tim Marshall refers to as infrastructuralism. In his contribution here, Marshall provides a detailed account of this emergent process, including attempts to integrate increased infrastructure spending with strategic spatial planning.

Mike Raco also takes infrastructure as the starting point for his contribution, providing a devastating critique of the impact of the Private Finance Initiative on the abilities of local communities and local governments to be more ‘localist’. Carefully tracing the rigidities and lack of local accountability of the PFI’s in one locality, Raco provides a depressing antidote to more aspirational accounts of the empowering potential of localism. Instead he points to how the global corporate entanglements of poorly managed state contractualism within a particular neoliberal ideological fix systemically undermine the capacity for progressive local reforms. The critical issue here concerns the inflexibilities involved once state authorities find themselves locked into very long-term legal contracts with corporations whose accountabilities are to their global shareholders in search of high returns rather than local communities in search of improved local services. There is a clear conflict here with democratic choice—in effect there is a ‘lock-in’ for a generation or more as a result of the decisions entered into at one particular moment in time—future generations and future politicians are rendered near powerless to bring about change in response to changing local needs and aspirations.

This all seems a long way from the aspirational goals of strategic spatial planning as a way of improving the accountability of planning, its capacity to integrate across sectors, and ability to think and act long term in pursuit

of the public good. Whilst in much of continental Europe spatial planning is seen as a progressive largely technical movement, in the UK its rise was particularly associated with a distinct era of New Labour, from 2002 to 2008. For some commentators, not least ourselves, this has been problematic, as there has been an unhealthy elision of professional practice and party political agendas, such that when New Labour started to lose its electoral appeal, almost inevitably the English variant of ‘spatial planning’ also became subject to growing critique, over both its effectiveness and its political agenda (Newman, 2008; Allmendinger and Haughton 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Haughton *et al.*, 2010; Haughton and Allmendinger, 2011).

The rise to power of the Coalition Government in 2010 has brought in a fundamental rethink about the purpose and processes of planning, mobilized around the vague notion of ‘localism’. Various announcements and policy initiatives, most notably the Decentralisation and Localism Bill published in December 2010, point toward a new era for planning characterized by a reduced central state presence, the shift from ‘top-down’ targets on housing, a deregulatory suite of proposals and a new sub-local, neighbourhood emphasis upon plan making and development, as Mark Baker and Cecilia Wong note. The implications of this agenda for urban regeneration are carefully unpicked here by Iain Deas, whilst Alan Townsend and Lee Pugalís perform a parallel dissection of the new localism in relation to local economic development, in particular the Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) created by the new government. The dismantling of New Labour’s regional institutional architecture led to concerns about the ongoing need for strategic spatial thinking above the level of local government, leading the new government to introduce LEPs as a way of address this ‘vacuum’. Though there is value in pitching strategic spatial thinking at this ‘sub-regional’ scale, as Townsend and Pugalís argue, it is still far from clear that LEPs are the appropriate vehicle for this, given their limited financial and analytical resources, and uncertain responsibilities. It is already clear that if they are to retain the interest of private sector actors, there will need to be a radical re-think about the powers of LEPs and commitment of government resources allied to clearer responsibilities.

So do the new reforms being brought in under the banner of localism spell the end of spatial planning in England? There is nothing specifically contrary to the spirit and purpose of spatial planning in the Coalition’s proposals. Indeed, some of the themes and tenets of spatial planning,

namely the emphasis upon collaborative processes and coordination across and between scales and sectors appear to be elements of the Government's proposals. And as a professional discourse and worldview spatial planning is more difficult to dismiss, particularly given the discretion at the heart of UK planning and the current emphasis upon localism. If Localism means anything then it should allow for a range of approaches to exist alongside more traditional regulatory models of planning, including varieties of spatial planning. So rather than vanquishing it, Localism could yet prove to be the saviour of spatial planning by allowing the broad approach that it represents to evolve and adapt to meet the demands of different places and circumstances.

Notwithstanding this, there is not one mention of spatial planning in the Decentralisation and Localism Act—and neither Coalition nor Opposition leaders mention the term any more—it is always simply planning. The only adherents left appear to be the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and planning academics, providing for a strange series of disconnects between the worlds of policy, politics and academia. Elements of the Coalition's proposals, such as the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Area Agreements would, at the very least, hint at a move away from some of the concerns of what was once known as spatial planning—an approach that was said to herald a more forward looking, integrative, participative approach to planning. However, separating 'spatial planning' as a political project from 'spatial planning' as a mindset and professional doctrine is not straightforward. Spatial planning as a doctrine of planning practice was always going to be loose fit with the priorities and policies of any government concerned with a winning elections and promoting a wide set of (sometimes contradictory) agendas. At best 'spatial planning' is in transition in England—it may be in its death throes, or it may be in a process of re-invention. One thing is clear however, whichever label we prefer to use: English planning now finds itself undergoing one of its periodic transformations from one paradigm to another.

It is interesting in this context to step back and look at the English experience as seen from the outside—not least because many other European countries have their own variants of spatial planning. In this light, the survival or failure of English spatial planning matters for other countries too, as the contribution by Bas Waterhout and colleagues demonstrates. A key question here concerns what, if anything, other countries can learn from

the English experience. Did the fate of spatial planning become too closely linked to the approach to planning and governance under New Labour, such that it became too politicized as a project? Whatever the answer is to this question, in the short term planners need to rethink their role more fundamentally for new times and an age of a small state and public sector austerity. Planning academics in this context have a potentially valuable contribution to make in thinking through both the lessons of the recent past and the wider implications of the current reforms to planning. That is exactly what the contributors to this volume set out to do.

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The Evolution and Trajectories of English Spatial Governance: ‘Neoliberal’ Episodes in Planning

PHIL ALLMENDINGER & GRAHAM
HAUGHTON

Graham Haughton, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK.

Abstract

English planning again finds itself in a transition from one paradigm—spatial planning—to another—localism. Whilst there is uncertainty and a debate over the significance of these changes and whether they represent a rupture or evolution, we argue in this paper that such change is best understood within the framework of neoliberalization. Seen from this perspective planning is a form of, or contributor to, neoliberal spatial governance. We explore how such an understanding helps explain temporal, spatial, and sectoral variance in planning as well as some of the characteristics of recent planning including scalar change, signature policy moments, resistance, tensions, and insurgent movements. We finally turn to some possible implications of the emerging paradigm.

Introduction

English planning is once again undergoing a major reorientation. The Coalition Government which took national office in May 2010 seems intent on introducing an eclectic and seemingly inchoate range of policies and initiatives that have been met with bewilderment and hostility (see, for example, Hall, 2010a; Lock, 2010; Shepley, 2010). In the run up to the 2010 election the Conservative Party issued a green paper, *Open Source Planning*, which was to greatly influence subsequent reforms to the planning system. Now rebranded as part of the Localism and Devolution agenda of the Coalition government, the thinking it contains appears set to replace Spatial Planning as the dominant paradigm in English planning. Rhetorically, this is presented as a shift in the emphasis from a ‘one size fits all’, top-down target-driven model to a more fragmented, locally determined, incentive driven approach.

‘Open source’ thinking for planning is deliberately presented as analogous to open source software development, which draws on the ‘wisdom of crowds’ and public spirited individuals and communities of interest rather than simply adopting a dominant corporate or governmental blueprint. This in turn reflects the emerging political rhetorical devices of ‘Localism’ and ‘The Big Society’, both of which emphasize the desire to allow communities to take on a greater role in identifying and addressing local needs. The flip side of such thinking is a much reduced role for the state in favor of a plurality of localist interventions. Despite the rhetoric, the emerging pluralist approach is tightly circumscribed. Communities can have a greater say in planning including preparing their own neighborhood plans, providing such plans conform to the national presumption in favor of sustainable development and are consistent with local plans and development frameworks. This change is the latest in a long line of alterations, incremental modifications, revisions, and reshapings of planning over the past 30 years or so (Haughton *et al.*, 2010).

The purpose of this paper is to advance a framework to help identify the underlying rationales for such transformative episodes, drawing on and developing from recent critical work on neoliberal policy experimentation and state rescaling. In the process, we provide a detailed periodization of the key moments in recent ‘neoliberal’ planning experiments, which differs from the well-known roll-back/roll-out distinction made in regime level accounts (Peck & Tickell, 2002). The advantage of focusing on a particular policy field, in this case planning, is that it helps highlight the role of institutional dynamics of neoliberalization, with different policy fields such as planning

having their own specific trajectories, momentum, and processes. Such details cannot be read off from more macro-level accounts of neoliberalism and neither can they be theorized from the more concrete analyses of actually existing neoliberalisms (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Leitner *et al.*, 2007).

More Abstract, macro-level and more nuanced, policy focused accounts of neoliberalization are best seen as complementary, rather than one being seen as conceptually subordinate, or one as being closer to political dynamics than the other. They function at different levels of Abstraction and with different forms of pertinence. Periodizations of neoliberalization processes at meso-level can map out differently than those at more macro-level. Moreover, macroor system-level periodizations do not necessarily ‘contain’ policy field periodizations like a ‘Russian Doll’, since they operate at different levels of Abstraction and reflect on different political dynamics.¹ So we might expect different periodizations to emerge, reflecting diverse institutional domains, and historical experiences. Nonetheless, we might also expect something to be holding them together, which is why we find it useful to frame our discussion in relation to roll-back and roll-out accounts of neoliberalization. Our interest here is in how neoliberal thinking involves a rethinking of both the broad frameworks for planning and its various strategic and implementation processes. By bringing in a sectoral perspective, our aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the evolutionary and transformative nature of neoliberalization, in the process adding to our understanding of how and why planning has been restructured over the past 30 years.

Whilst some talk of a ‘revolution’ in the current changes in planning (Hall, 2010b) this may yet prove to be wide of the mark. Both spatial and open source planning maintain longstanding key characteristics of the English system, including the separation of plan from permission and the discretionary nature of decision making on individual proposals. Any understanding of change in planning has to engage with outcomes as well as intentions, reality as well as rhetoric. We need only to look back to the 1980s to see how national planning initiatives played out very differently at the local level—planning has long been subject to powerful discursive meta-narratives at the national level, not always reflected in concrete practices at the local level, where selective resistance and local discretion have ensured varying degrees of conformity and levels of contestation. This points to a

further purpose of this paper which is to explore the extent to which, given the multi-scalar, discretionary nature of planning and the scope for local autonomy, such national changes are interpreted and implemented at sub-national scales.

We start from the position that land-use planning in the UK context has, to greater and lesser degrees, always been market supportive (Scott & Roweis, 1977; Harvey, 1989). Operating as it does today in a policy environment that is often widely, if over simplistically, referred to as neoliberal it is tempting to read off many recent reforms of planning as in some way 'neoliberal'. After all, it is governments that have the ultimate say in defining the powers of planning so if central governments are operating in broadly 'neoliberal' ways, then surely changes to planning would reflect this?

The term neoliberalism is widely and sometimes misleadingly used as shorthand for what are in reality fast evolving, multi-faceted and spatially variable practices and policies to support a market-enabling approach. Indeed, there has been considerable debate about the helpfulness of the label 'neoliberalism' and its conceptual status (Castree, 2006; Gamble, 2009; Peck *et al.*, 2009), with 'neoliberalism' in effect a moving target, making it difficult to achieve clarity in identifying and defining the term. This lack of clarity has led both Lovering (2007) and Peck *et al.* (2009) to conclude that it is more helpful to think about processes of 'neoliberalization', emphasizing the dynamic processes through which 'neoliberalism' is continuously being transformed. It is salutary nonetheless to begin our discussion with David Harvey's useful summary of neoliberalism, which he portrays as a process based upon the:

theory of political economic practices which proposes that human wellbeing can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices... State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interests will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (Harvey, 2006, p. 145).

A key additional feature is the attempted normalization of neoliberal thinking through its discursive representation by proponents as a form of natural order (often citing 'the invisible hand of the market') and an associated portrayal of alternatives as deviant.

But gainsaying such over-simplistic representations, neoliberalization in its various manifestations is always a political project, where the state far from being powerless intervenes in active ways, stepping up spending and regulation in some areas even as it is cutting back or reorganizing in others (Peck, 2001; Lovering, 2007). Nor is the neoliberalization of policy something that is simply passed down from above. Rather, it a process that is always mediated, filtered, negotiated, contested, and reformulated through various scales of governance, in ways that are far from unidirectional such that neoliberalization's institutional forms and programmatic tendencies cannot be read off prescriptively at any scale (Peck, 2001). It is more helpful to think about how actually existing neoliberalism in fact comprises a series of different but often interconnected neoliberalisms (Castree, 2008, p. 134; see also Brenner & Theodore, 2002).

At one level, this variability should be unsurprising to planners: It has long been recognized that the autonomy and discretion afforded to planners and planning practice make it difficult and misleading to read off local practices and impacts from widely-framed theoretical constructs (Meyerson & Banfield, 1955). In related vein, the neoliberalization of planning should not be seen as either a blanket set of tenets and policy prescriptions handed down from above or as a process through which local areas passively respond to 'neoliberal' nostrums and policy regimes. Even in a hierarchical statutory process such as planning, there is scope not simply for discretion but resistance and alternative pathways. Moreover, the experimental nature of neoliberalism can lead to some areas or initiatives being 'favored' over others—think for instance of the Urban Development Corporations in the 1980s. The same example helps reveal how in certain periods planning reforms can be at the leading edge of national experimentation in neoliberal spatial governance, whilst lagging in other periods.

The broad tenets of neoliberalism, its variegation and mediation may lead some to conclude that neoliberal theorists and those understanding policy change within a neoliberal framework want to have their cake and eat it: If there is a marketbased policy change then it can be labeled 'neoliberal', similarly, if there is a 'u' turn in policy that involves more dirigiste, seemingly anti-market state forms then these too can be argued to fall within the ambit of neoliberalism. The resolution of the idea that neoliberalism is 'everything and nothing' lies in, first, the timescale over which neoliberalism needs to be understood and, second, the need for regular change in planning to accommodate and address contradictions in different approaches. With

regards to duration, there is little doubt that the overall direction and change for planning over the past three to four decades has been towards facilitating growth in ways that maintain the legitimacy of planning. Gough (2002) argues that the underlying logic of neoliberalism is to free markets and private property from 'socialization', that is, state interference and infringement by others. It might be easier to see this logic in eras of deregulation and anti-planning rhetoric and action than when planning is charged with delivering more social and environmental objectives alongside growth, such as in the era 2002–2008. Such seemingly 'anti-market' eras constitute what Peck (2010) terms 'setbacks' and could readily be explained by short-term political expediency. Neoliberalism needs to maintain its legitimacy after all. However, there is another dimension to such seemingly contradictory policy agendas. Neoliberalism is not anti-planning: There is an important market supportive role for planning. Neoliberal planning also involves the capture and reorientation of planning. In other words, planning is both an object and subject of neoliberalism. Thus, the introduction of policies such as climate change into planning objectives and tools could be understood as neoliberal setbacks, but a closer examination would reveal other possibilities and dimensions including the need for planning to demonstrate continued legitimacy and with this the effectiveness of each round of new policies.

This brings us to the second element for understanding and distinguishing neoliberal planning in the English context. There can be little doubt that planning undergoes regular shifts as a result of the need to address a range of contradictory objectives. A neoliberal planning system could emphasize speed of decision making through a zoning-based approach. Such an approach is more piecemeal and less flexible than that which characterized planning during the 1980s. However, a market supportive neoliberal planning could also involve a more interventionist regime that coordinated and integrated different sectors and scales minimizing commercial uncertainty and risk. Such a system is slower and is roughly akin to the English spatial planning regime from 2002 (see below). Regular change occurs when the negative consequences of one regime (e.g. lack of flexibility, slowness of decision making, etc.) are perceived to outweigh the benefits of that approach.

The upshot of this is a planning system regularly though fruitlessly searching for the perfect market supportive scalar and institutional fix. By this, we mean the search for an appropriate geoinstitutional architecture for

taking forward state strategies, whether ‘neoliberal’ or otherwise. In some periods, regional scale interventions may be favored, at others some combination of national and local approaches may be preferred. It would be reductionist and foolish to claim that all change in planning can be explained by a broad, Abstract framework. Clearly, it cannot. What neoliberalism does is provide a heuristic to help guide understanding. In the rest of the paper, we develop this framework and explore further the temporal, spatial, and sectoral variegation of planning as a form of neoliberal spatial governance. We highlight the variety of practices and tensions that underpin the seemingly unquenchable political desire to reform planning, the reasons why regular upheaval is an inevitable part of this approach and what such an understanding implies for future change.

Variegated Neoliberalism and the Neoliberalization of Planning

The growing body of critical work on neoliberalization provides a useful, broad framework for interrogating both the evolving market orientation of planning and the variety of its manifestations. The high levels of experimentation, continuous re-interpretation and consequent evolution of neoliberal tenets at different scales mean that it is more accurate to talk of multiple plannings which, to varying degrees may be influenced by what Castree (2006) refers to as the dogmas and doxas of neoliberalism. Whilst there have been wide-ranging explorations around the nature and institutional characters of coordinated and liberal capitalism models there has been less attention, as Peck and Theodore (2007) highlight, to variegated capitalism, or the underlying sub-national management of the contradictions of neoliberalization. Despite an increasingly sophisticated theoretical understanding of state rescaling, there is limited work that attempts ‘to explore the concrete practices of rescaling in a theoretically informed and *informing* fashion’ (Peck, 2002, p. 333). Addressing this concern, we seek to develop here an understanding of planning as a form of variegated neoliberal spatial governance.

The UK experience needs to be set within debates about the different flavors and characteristics of neoliberalism, or the *varieties of capitalism*, as

Peck and Theodore (2007, p. 732) put it. Such variations over time and space are both reflected in and mediated by sub-national state society mechanisms, such as planning, that are tasked with the management and facilitation of development whilst resolving the tensions inherent within neoliberal thinking, such as protecting individual freedoms whilst being market enabling. Thinking critically about variegated neoliberalism focuses specific attention on the institutional assemblages working at and across different various scales, combining to filter and interpret the broad project of neoliberalism, in the process creating and destroying various strategies and modes of governance in an on-going attempt to overcome the internal contradictions and crises of neoliberalism.

Attention to the *temporal variegation* of neoliberalism focuses upon and highlights the evolutionary processes of a plurality of capitalisms (Hay, 1999; Geddes, 2005). Peck and Tickell (2002) usefully draw attention to the different emphases within neoliberalism through time, with the late 1970s and 1980s characterized by deregulation and a rhetoric of minimal state (or ‘roll-back’) neoliberalism, whilst the 1990s and 2000s experiments were typified by the ‘roll-out’ of a variety of market supportive state forms and modes of governance. More recently, a slightly different terminology has posited the 1970s and 1980s as ‘Disarticulated neoliberalism’ leading on to a period from the 1990s of ‘Deepening neoliberalism’ (Brenner *et al.* 2010, see also Peck, 2010, [Chapter 1](#)).

In both cases, the emphasis is on explaining changing approaches to managing the contradictions of previous experiments in deand re-regulation, continuously reformulating the role of the state in relation to the market and civil society, where state roll-back may be a recurring aspiration, even as most neoliberal proponents accept a role for the state in regulating undesirable market behavior. As such there is a continuing interplay of aspects of the roll-back and roll-out dimensions of neoliberalization. This leads Peck (2010, p. 25) to argue that in the current economic crisis we may be witnessing a ‘roiling neoliberalism, as a still-dominant but deeply flawed “settlement,” increasingly buffeted by crises’. The important point here is that whilst it is possible to discern major shifts in how neoliberal thinking is presented and operationalized, we should not expect these changes to manifest themselves in a blanket fashion (Peck, 2010). The precise manifestations of regulatory experiments at both system and policy field levels will always be temporally and spatially variegated.

As an example, deregulating planning in the early 1980s was expected to help promote growth in the south east of England. In practice, however, this planning roll-back created a range of adverse consequences for the market including uncertainty and increased risk for developers, who sought certainty over plans for an area before committing themselves to substantial investments (Breheny, 1989; Peck & Tickell, 1992, 1995; Allmendinger & Thomas, 1998; Allmendinger, 2011). The regulatory deficit in planning also contributed to infrastructure overload and an inability to deal with local resistance to new housing development, leading to housing scarcity and price rises, in turn threatening the growth prospects of the region and indeed the nation by feeding an inflationary wage spiral. The contradictions of this early experimentation led to a rethink of the deregulatory aspects of neoliberalization and a greater emphasis on re-regulation, so that by the early 1990s major changes in planning emerged, as the pro-business ‘presumption in favor of development’ was dropped and regional strategic planning began a hesitant renaissance (Haughton & Counsell, 2004; Allmendinger, 2011).

The break from early experiments in state roll-back became more pronounced during the 1990s and early 2000s. In the US under Clinton and the UK under Blair then Brown, a new Third Way approach was discursively framed in ways that involved the state actively promoting economic growth, framing this as compatible with environmental and social goals, not least by efforts to promote a more active civil society, a new link between citizen rights and responsibilities, a role for the state in social investment and protecting the poorest in society (Geddes, 2005). This approach also placed a growing emphasis on partnerships as a means of promoting public and private sector coordination and improved policy integration. In this new accommodation, the state’s reworked role was not simply to de-regulate, divest, and open up markets. The role of government was also to reregulate and where necessary invest in ways that reconcile a continuing progrowth agenda with wider societal issues, not least growing concern about environment and citizenship.

The Third Way approach is already history, replaced by an era of public sector austerity following the financial sector crisis, 2007–present, in which most western governments have found themselves borrowing heavily to ride-out the crisis and rebuild confidence in the banking system. This has increased government debt, which will need to be paid for by some combination of public sector cutbacks and tax increases. The latest crisis reveals both the enduring nature of neoliberal philosophy and its mutability.

So whilst we can see continuing discursive support for the promotion of business competitiveness, we can also see how under pressure governments have become highly interventionist and been selectively prepared to question the power and operation of markets, even as they have propped them up in order to prepare for a future of ‘market-led’, not state-led, growth. The implications for the planning system are still not clear—but the rhetoric surrounding the rapid abolition of regional scale planning and the proposed Infrastructure Planning Commission, alongside the re-empowerment of local planning authorities, are suggestive of a further adaptation to rather than a rejection of neoliberal thinking.

The second dimension of variegated neoliberalism concerns *spatial and scalar variegations*. It would seem only natural that overly deterministic understandings which posit economic convergence would break down in the face of evidence that points to mediation through local institutional and governance contexts. Brenner (2004) has argued that what he terms ‘state spatial projects’ seek to bring internal coherence and functional coordination to the state apparatus, and ‘differentiate state activities among different levels of territorial administration and coordinate state activities among diverse locations’ (p. 92). This may be so though as far as recent experiences in the UK are concerned the search for coherence has proved problematic and, at the very least, variable, not least in relation to planning. A range of successive, distinctive scalar strategies have been employed by the UK government which have reworked the scales of planning as a tool of neoliberal spatial governance. Early incarnations involved fairly crude attempts at deregulation and market reorientation, for instance taking planning powers away from elected local government in the Urban Development Corporation areas (Thornley, 1993). Other notable moments in the often deeply politicized rescaling of statutory planning include the abolition of the metropolitan counties in 1986 by the Conservatives, including the Greater London Council, and subsequently the removal of most strategic planning powers from the Shire counties in 2004 by New Labour. Layered across this have been the changing fortunes of regional planning, residualized in the early 1980s by Conservative governments, then temporarily at least bolstered by New Labour in the 2000s (see Haughton & Counsell, 2004; Haughton *et al.*, 2010), only to be abandoned once again by a new government in 2010.

In addition to temporal and spatial variegation questions also arise over how neoliberal spatial governance has been ‘rolled out’ in the face of the

challenges presented by other, competing discourses around, for example, social exclusion, climate change, and sustainable development. Neoliberalization as a process tends to be creative and flexible in meeting such challenges, responding in pragmatic fashion, and spatially variably ways, that also reflect and build upon existing locally embedded institutional and political accommodations (Brenner & Theodore, 2002; Peck & Tickell, 2002). The result is that issues such as climate change and sustainable development get absorbed into neoliberal policy agendas unevenly, a process which also lends itself to considerable potential for sharing experience and possibilities. The resulting process of experimentation and policy transfer is arguably central to the resilience of neoliberalization. Variiegation is not an incidental outcome of neoliberalism, but a desired attribute that builds in an ever expanding set of new possibilities for rolling out neoliberalism itself (see also Peck, 2010).

Periodizing the Neoliberalization of Planning

In this section, we attempt to provide a more fine-grained periodization of the evolution of the neoliberalization of planning than is suggested by phraseology such as roll-back and roll-out neoliberalism. Though this type of account works well in broadly constructed accounts of neoliberalization, examining a specific sector in a particular national context allows a more detailed account to emerge. Any periodization of neoliberal strategies relating to a particular sector such as planning will always amount to a heuristic given the multiple threads of evolving and overlapping policy, time lags, and the need to generalize across space and scale. [Table 1](#) sets out such a periodization aware of the inevitable limitations and over-simplifications involved.

The approach taken is based on a new institutionalist tripartite distinction which posits neoliberalism as an overarching *philosophy* within which are *paradigms* that provide meso-level underlying assumptions and organizing principles that allow

TABLE 1 Periodizing planning as a form of neoliberal spatial governance

TABLE 1. Periodizing planning as a form of neoliberal spatial governance

Era	Dominant paradigm	Key themes	Dominant scales	Key scalar tensions or scalar fault-lines	Key moments and policies	Outcomes
1979–1991	Pro-business, deregulatory approach: 'Roll back' neoliberalism	Planning system reactionary and explicitly market focused. Conditional local experimentation (e.g. EZs, UDCs, SPZs). Release enterprise and reduce regulatory burdens. Dismantling apparatus for regional strategy making. Disbelief in ability of planning's ability to be long-term in its strategic gaze.	National through market driven legislation and policy. Minimization of local discretion through use of zoning mechanisms and appointed boards. Some centrally prescribed local experimentation, notably UDCs and EZs.	National vs. regional, as regional institutions dismantled or downgraded some areas created informal regional planning bodies. National vs. metropolitan counties (with met counties abolished 1986). National impatience with local government (e.g. in some cases UDCs imposed).	1980 Local Government, Planning and Land Act introduced Enterprise Zones and Urban Development Corporations. Circular 22/80 removing design from planning considerations. 1986 Housing and Planning Act introduced Simplified Planning Zones. 'The Future of Development Plans' Consultation, 1986 removing the need to prepare development plans. 'Lifting the Burden' White Paper, 1985. 1987 Use Classes Order introduced B1 Use Class allowing change of use from industry to offices without need to obtain planning permission. Emphasis upon speed of decision making in development control, monitored through targets.	Uncertainty for communities and land owners over future development. Large number of new settlement proposals introduced that threatened government popularity. Local authorities often ignored policy changes undermining them. Evidence that some high profile initiatives such as SPZs were used for ends other than those envisaged by Government, i.e. increasing regulation. Growing environmental concerns towards the latter part of the era, especially after 1989, helped force rethink.

1991– 1997	Centralized, hierarchical, policy led: 'State steering'.	Plan-led, pro-active planning. Expansion of central policy guidance, introduction of plan-led approach to ensure consistency and certainty.	National and local. Reintroduction of regional steering through devolution of Government Offices.	Counties vs. national government (especially Home Counties in relation to housing numbers).	Planning and Compensation Act, 1991 introduced 'plan-led' approach representing a 'u' turn. PPG 1, General Policy and Principles & PPG 12 Development Plans, 1992 both set out new proactive planning framework. Gov office of regions role enhanced (c.1994) Kyoto Agreement, 1997 provided further impetus to planning to mitigate impacts of climate change.	Rigid, hierarchical control required plans and policies to be up to date and material. This was often not the case and system fell back into project-led approach of previous era. Separation of plan from permission meant that certainty over future development was provisional and dependent upon securing planning permission. System remained slow.
1997– 2000	'Rolled out' neoliberalism. Pragmatic and fluid: Searching for a new scalar fix.	Devolution and economic development through Regional Development Agencies.	Resurgence in regional and devolved nation planning and economic development. New regional strategies and organizations.	National vs. regional and new nations as devolution opened up possibility of divergent strategies.	Modernizing Planning Green Paper, 1998 Urban Task Force Urban Renaissance 1998 McKinsey Report, 1998 Scotland Act, 1998, Wales Act, 1998 Regional Development Agency Act, 1998 Regional Assembly model rolled out from 1998	Devolution and rescaling ignored more fundamental issues with development plans and development control. New fix simply added an additional level of regulation which, combined with emerging new agendas such as urban renaissance exposed a complex sets of processes and plans.
2000– 2002	Speed and certainty: Rescaling agendas and debates.	Speed and certainty of planning service through targets and	National and regional. National level to provide themes and	Aim of democratically elected regional assemblies was	Local Government Act, 2000 introduced local Strategic Partnerships and	The proposed new system of development plans came under heavy criticism from

		incentives. 'Modernization and culture change' through proposed new system of development plans at regional and local scales.	objectives, the regional scale to determine outputs from system such as housing targets. The local level would identify sites.	dropped after north east referendum. Lack of legitimacy stored up problems over housing and growth led strategies in the future.	Community Strategies. Urban White Paper, 2000 (as above) CBI Planning Brief, 2001 criticized slowness and uncertainty of planning. Planning Green Paper, 2001 proposed to speed up and create greater certainty through new system of development plans. Business Planning Zones. Planning Delivery Grant aimed to speed up development control.	House of Commons Select Committee and Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Complex objectives including sustainable development could not be achieved with a scaled back system. Change of Secretary of State in 2001 led to 'u' turn on objectives of new system but not the new system of development planning.
2002–2006	Spatial planning: Housing and development without conflict	Multi-sectoral and multi-scalar coordination and integration of development. Sustainable development and climate change through development. Move from 'balancing' objectives of each other to win-win-win approach. Meta-regions promoted to pursue growth in	Scalar functionality: National scale provided discourses around sustainable growth, regional tier provided targets across local and sub-regional boundaries, local scale implemented and delivered through new, more easily prepared and adopted development plans. Housing market	Regional tier increasingly seen as imposing growth creating tensions with elected local tier. City Regions increasingly identified as being critical to deliver housing growth and economic development. Required complex, multi-agency partnerships. Overlooked aspect of	Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 introduced new system of development planning. Sustainable Communities Plan, 2003 emphasized growth strategy. Barker Review, 2004 focused upon housing delivery. Egan Review, 2004 explored the skills needed within the built environment professions to	Strategic behavior on part of local planning authorities meant that targets achieved though speed not improved. Skills deficit and lack of resources within local planning authorities limited roll out of new approach. Mismatch between local government boundaries and functional (e.g. sub-regional) planning areas

	Thames Gateway and Northern Way.	remains dysfunctional, overheated in south whilst struggling in parts of north. Four national growth areas designated in south, plus nine housing renewal pathfinders in North and Midlands.	system was development control which became politicized and the focus for contestation.	deliver growth agenda. PPS 1 and PPS 12, 2005 introduced notion of spatial planning. Local Area/Multi-Area Agreements introduced to help promote sub-regional and multi-tier partnerships. Planning Advisory Service and ATLAS, 2004 among other measures introduced to help manage and facilitate new growth agenda.	undermines delivery requiring complex and unwieldy partnership 'glue'. Lack of incentives for communities to accept more development. Multiple objectives caused confusion on the ground: what was sustainable development? Lack of understanding of the point of the new approach: Stafford and Lichfield Core Strategies found unsound, 2006.	
2006–2010	Economic-led delivery: Scaling back ambitions	Explicitly economy and competition focused. Delivery and outcomes prioritized. Re-parameterizing consensus-based approach, notably Infrastructure Planning Commission.	National and sub-regional. City regions and multi-area agreements (MAAs) as sub-regional forms experimented with.	Regions and national. Devolved nations and national as they struggle to gain new powers and regions as they face possible abolition.	Planning Act 2008 introduced Infrastructure Planning Commission. Killian-Prety Review, 2008 led to widespread streamlining of planning processes. Barker Review, 2006 highlighted the importance of economic development. Sub-National Review and Taking Forward Sub-National Review, 2008	Economic downturn has temporarily removed some of the growing conflict around development. However, clear refocus of system, policies and outcomes to more explicit growth agenda. Resistance from some Local Planning Authorities over 'top-down' housing and development targets.

					highlighted sub-regional planning. PPS 12, 2008 streamlined plan-led approach. Development Management Consultation, 2009 further attempt to create a pro-development culture change in planning.	
2010–	Pro-market Localism. Deregulation of controls and targets. Loosening of policy cascade and hierarchy.	Localism. Greater control over development if a plan is in place. Termed 'Open Source Planning' by coalition. Allowing variation in approaches and policies within loose national framework, though within a National Planning Framework and presumption in favor of development.	National through permission attitude towards local variegation. Sub-regional through the 'duty to cooperate' across administrative boundaries. Local. Local Planning to reflect local priorities within pro-market context. Simplified planning regimes and necessity to have plan in place to be able to resist development pressure.	Local vs. local. Resisting development in high demand, mainly southern English localities leads to emergence of 'NIMLA'—Not in My Local Area—attitudes. Wealthy areas choosing to forego financial inducement to bring forward more housing development. The word 'region' becomes almost unmentionable in policy circles.	Coalition Government agenda for planning emerging through the Localism Bill. National Infrastructure Planning Commission folded into the Planning Inspectorate. White Paper on Local Economic Growth in November 2010 emphasizes functional, sub-regional planning for economic growth, and prosperity. Enterprise Zones relaunched.	Abolition of Regional Strategies and Regional Development Agencies and creation of 24 Local Enterprise Partnerships between regional and local levels. Withdrawal of Core Strategies in some areas. Fall in expected housing delivery regardless of recession. Density targets abolished. Backlash from business and development interests.

policy actors to interpret situations within common 'frames', defining the problems to be 'solved' and the methods to solve them by the third level of *policies*. Policies are the response of policy actors to particular issues that are constructed and debated within the limits established by paradigms and philosophies (see Schmidt, 2008; Allmendinger, 2011). The distinction is not merely one of discursive frames within which options and strategies are created but also of *durée*. Both paradigms and policies evolve and change

through public debate, whilst philosophies are a relatively long standing collection of underlying assumptions. In the case of neoliberalism as a philosophy, for instance, its antecedents can usefully be traced back to the work of Hayek through various moments of rediscovery and evolutionary development (see Peck, 2008; also Harvey, 2005).

This distinction between philosophy, paradigms, and policies echoes important features of planning and other sectors that remain predominantly embedded within cascading, hierarchical state processes and institutional frameworks despite the normative and practical shifts towards more networked forms of governance. As discussed earlier, a common characteristic of planning in such regimes is the nature of local autonomy and professional discretion. This is itself mirrored in the tripartite distinction as the spaces between paradigms and policies become ‘creative gaps’, where there is an invitation to interpret and construct approaches to material, specific, and local issues within broader understandings. The scope of possible solutions and autonomy of policies can be tested within the bounds of background paradigms. Such a perspective both opens up an evolutionary and experimental perspective on variegated neoliberalism as well as raising questions around the significance of, for example, local and professional discourses in policy interpretation and choice.

The periodization of neoliberal spatial governance that we develop here identifies several distinctive dominant paradigms within which are a range of strategies and policies. Thus, Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) and Enterprise Zones were policies or strategies within the distinct deregulatory planning paradigm of 1979–1991. However, like most heuristics there are exceptions and ‘ragged edges’ to the overall framework, with competing and overlapping paradigms also evident. Urban Development Corporation (UDCs), for example, arose again during 2002–2006 though in a modified form more aligned to the then paradigm that emphasized community engagement. The emphasis here then is not on providing a linear account of the progress and triumphs of ‘planning’ but a rather more nuanced account of a punctuated equilibrium, one that acknowledges path dependency in shaping policy trajectories, whilst emphasizing both continuities and discontinuities. There are inevitably dead-ends, u-turns, and multiplicity in how planning experiments are unleashed or recalled, where evolution is based on changes in professional thinking and discourse, involving episodic and incomplete learning from the past and elsewhere, enmeshed within a fast

moving political context which alters the boundaries of what is feasible and desirable.

[Table 1](#) identifies 6 distinctive periods of planning between 1979 and 2010 highlighting for each dominant paradigms and scales for policy innovation, signature policy moments, and scalar faultlines. It also adds in a 7th embryonic period, providing some pointers to the currently emerging approach of the Coalition government that assumed power in May 2010. The result is a concise overview of key aspects of the temporal, scalar, and spatial variegation of neoliberalism as evidenced through planning in the UK, focused mainly on England.

The different eras of neoliberal spatial governance outlined in [Table 1](#) point to an unsettled (and unsettling) pursuit of a stable mode of spatial governance, suggestive of the inevitability of further periods of change as new configurations emerge. What is clear is that each era is distinguished by different emphases, tools, policies, instruments, discourses, and scales. This is not to suggest that each paradigm is a simple reaction against the inevitable failure of planning to address the tensions within neoliberalism. Whilst there is an element of reaction there is also a degree of evolution and learning as subsequent approaches build upon, rearrange and add to the institutional and policy fixes of each previous era. Equally, there is also a degree of comparative learning from within a jurisdiction (e.g. other sectors and regulatory frameworks) and outwith (e.g. approaches used in other countries).

Our periodization reveals quite starkly the way in which scalar tensions have been ever present throughout the past 30 years as politicians have sought new scalar fixes that transcend some of the barriers, as they see them, to effective planning. This suggests that these barriers are more profound than simply ones of finding the appropriate scales for strategic thinking and delivery (see Haughton *et al.*, 2010). It also suggests the folly of unrealistic expectations over the ability of any newly empowered scale of governance, such as regions, city-regions, or neighborhoods, to provide a ‘silver bullet’ solution to long-standing planning problems. Indeed, our analysis is suggestive of the prosaic realities of the historical as well as contemporary institutional dynamics of planning, which has long seen itself as coordinating others in pursuit of ‘the public good’.

[Table 2](#) focuses on the emergent scalar practices of planning by highlighting different types of spaces and experimental scalar fixes. A largely overlooked dimension of variegated neoliberalism involves the

distinction between the formal and informal spaces and scales of planning, highlighting the co-existence of formal, hierarchical scales of statutory planning, and other often more delivery-oriented ‘soft spaces’ (see Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009; Haughton *et al.*, 2010). At one level, the emergence of ‘soft spaces’ of spatial governance is almost inevitable and derives from a mismatch between historic, rigid scalar fixes, and more functional areas around, for example, cities and their hinterlands. At another level, however, there is evidence that soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries are being used not only to supplement formal processes but also to usurp them in order to overcome resistance to growth (see Haughton *et al.*, 2010, [Chapter 8](#)). However, such resistance can itself be a dominant characteristic of and motivation for the identification and use of soft spaces. The use of such informal spaces to facilitate or resist the dominant planning philosophy of the moment is underpinned by the autonomy and discretion embedded within UK local government and planning.

The continuous (re)creation of scales, spaces, and practices is a key and common element in English planning particularly given the disparate circumstances and needs of specific localities. At one end of the spectrum, there is what we might term ‘assenting creation’ that seeks to work within prevailing paradigms through the development of spaces, processes, and scales of practice that deliver growth-oriented experiments by reworking the distribution of statutory powers across the scales of governance. This is in effect the mainstream of planning at any

TABLE 2 The shifting scales, spaces, and practices of planning

	1979–1991	1991–1997	1997–2000	2000–2002	2002–2006	2006–2010
Informal scales, spaces, and practices	Planning fragmented into different 'styles' some of which echoed the formal and others used the lack of specificity of practice at the local level creatively though within broad market-led framework. Local/sub-local or site level became more significant in practice in the absence of plans and strategies. Some local authorities created informal networks to coordinate and create regional level planning.	Growing work by sub-regional coalitions of local authorities to create functional planning areas. Creative use of existing plan vehicles to widen the scope of planning to address wider concerns.	Continued growth in coalitions of local authorities to create functional planning areas. Creative use of existing plan vehicles to widen the scope of planning to address wider concerns.	Range of strategic behavior on the part of local authorities as they seek to meet performance targets. Growing use of masterplans, often led by consultancies. Core cities group use the failure of the NE referendum to step-up their campaign for a stronger city-regional focus in policy.	Emergence of functional planning areas—soft spaces—and layered and overlapping strategies and plans—fuzzy boundaries often alongside more formal or statutory plans and strategies. Emergence often linked to bureaucratic and lengthy formal processes. Soft spaces broadly at two scales—large site scale and sub-regional. However, such spaces and processes condoned and even encouraged by Government.	LEPS likely to be selective, key informal spaces along with sub-regional strategies that emerge to fill the vacuum left by RS abolition.
Formal scales, spaces, and practices	National scale dominant through diminution of local discretion and the expansion of central planning guidance. Experimental spaces introduced, e.g. Urban Development Corporations and Enterprise Zones.	National scale through 'plan-led' approach and creation of Government Offices to impose national priorities more effectively at the regional and local levels.	Devolution and economic development through Regional Development Agencies and regional planning bodies. Sustainability appraisal and growth targets introduced.	Focus upon speed and certainty through development of performance targets and indicators. Exploration of new scales through strategies and co-ordination, including Multi Area Agreements.	Multi-scalar, partnership-led spatial planning. Large growth in central guidance and control. Efforts to create policy cascade and conformity through re-emphasis of 'plan-led' approach.	Refocus upon economic development. Regional and sub-regional (functional) planning areas privileged.

Alternative scales, spaces, and practices of resistance	Wide range of examples of planners using discretion within the system to create alternatives to the nationally dominant, market-led approach mostly at sub-local/site level. Alternative mechanisms introduced, particularly around public involvement, to counter market bias, e.g. Coin Street (Brindley <i>et al.</i> , 1996). Metropolitan County Councils abolished.	Lack of incentives for localities to accept growth and growing environmental awareness led to resistance to pro-growth planning at the local level. Some planning authorities experimented with 'environment-led' planning processes, using concepts of 'strong sustainability' to resist central targets for housing and minerals (e.g. West Sussex and Berkshire, see Counsell, 1999; Owens & Cowell, 2002).	Growing use of partnerships encouraged by Third Way agenda.	Rise of PUSH (Partnership for South Hampshire) and SHUV (South Hampshire's Unheard Voices) to contest and influence the drafting of draft RSS for the South East (Glasson & Marshall, 2007).	'Plan-led' approach undermined by general lack of up to date plans and strategies focuses attention on development control dimension. Local scales become highly contested as some communities strive to resist development pressures and the implications of growth become material. Legal challenges to regional strategies from local authorities and to specific schemes from residents.	Legal challenges to Regional Spatial Strategies and housing targets. Numerous judicial reviews of local planning authority decisions.
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moment in time, as planners adapt to the changing possibilities offered up by the ways in which governments reshape the frameworks of planning. We have already noted for instance the changing roles of county and regional planning, in a deeply politicized rescaling of the formal system of planning.

The informal spaces of planning ([Table 2](#)) are also largely 'assenting' to the prevailing paradigm, helping to create supportive forms of neoliberal spatial governance through predominantly bespoke practices tailored to specific needs and circumstances. Such practices are experimental and push the boundaries of existing statutory requirements in an inventive way. Rather than replacing formal or statutory approaches, however, they tend to mirror or complement them (Haughton *et al.*, 2010). Thus, local authorities may

enter into partnerships with a range of public and private bodies operating at different scales in order to coordinate strategy making and implementation.

A final category of alternative spaces and practices of resistance highlights how the same relative autonomy and discretion within the planning system may also be used to more dissenting ends. What we are trying to highlight here is the scope for alternative practices and the reorientation of planning practices, scales, and spaces to challenge and subvert neoliberal spatial governance. These are not always necessarily progressive. As well as nefarious uses of planning to reinforce, for example, segregation of ethnic groups there are also a range of ‘darker sides’ of planning practice where seemingly transparent and professional processes are subverted to benefit narrow or political interests (see, for example, Flyvbjerg, 1998; Yiftachel, 1998). Nonetheless, such practices demonstrate how planning can be used as a mechanism of resistance and even insurgence against prevailing paradigms and even philosophies operating at different, higher scales. There is a range of examples of such resistant planning and it is worth noting that during the period 1979–1991 resistant and insurgent practices were common reactions against crude deregulatory and centralization strategies. Some local authorities filled the spaces created by a ‘rolled back’ state with their own policies and process that represented local values and priorities (see Brindley *et al.*, 1996; Allmendinger & Thomas, 1998). During other eras when national strategies were less confrontational and the gap with local priorities less pronounced more informal practices emerged around, for example, improving the effectiveness of spatial strategy making across multiple administrative and sectoral boundaries (While *et al.*, 2004). Dissenting planning practices have taken a range of forms from selective (including perverse) interpretation of national planning policy to the hijacking of initiatives that seek to deregulate planning and using them to increase regulation (see Thornley, 1993; Brindley *et al.*, 1996; Allmendinger & Thomas, 1998). The motives for such practices are not necessarily or even ordinarily underpinned by a desire to resist neoliberalism *per se* but can be driven by a desire to protect professional autonomy.

Conclusions

This paper has explored the role of neoliberalism as a political-economic governance ideology that is driving the search for more effective forms of planning and the resultant outcomes. Inevitably such an interpretation raises a multitude of issues, not least about the distinctiveness of the English experience, and if the planning systems of other developed countries are characterized by what appears from the outside as relative stability why does the English system go through such regular upheavals (see Waterhout *et al.*, this issue)?

One of the advantages of using planning as a ‘way in’ to explore variegated neoliberalism is that it provides insights into variable practices, manifestations, and spaces of resistance as well as allowing identification of distinct eras or paradigms. Each era of neoliberal spatial governance will be both unique and ephemeral. The uniqueness comes not only from the paradigms, such as spatial planning, but from the policies and local manifestations as actors and networks seek to understand and draw upon interpretations of the dominant paradigm within local contexts and forms of governance. The ephemeral nature of each paradigm derives from the constant attempts to tackle tensions inherent within neoliberalism as well as the inevitable drawbacks of any paradigm itself.

The recent example of ‘spatial planning’ is illustrative of both differentiation and transience. Whilst spatial planning sought to close off dissent and create consensus around growth it was dependent upon a legislative framework that allowed those who sought to oppose growth the mechanisms to do so. There was enough discretion and autonomy to allow local re-interpretation and resistance. On its own this would have been sufficient to create the need for the emergence of a subsequent paradigm, though the onset of the recession and the impact upon development also undermined spatial planning (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012).

Whilst future gazing is fraught with difficulties and risks it is worth noting that there are some recurring themes and patterns in the evolution of planning not least in the re-introduction of Enterprise Zones in 2011. The more deregulated, marketled approach of the 1980s was criticized for creating uncertainty and lacking strategic overview. The result was a shift to a system that emphasized both. Yet the resulting adoption of a plan-led approach tended to be slow and costly. The shift back to a more local, ‘open sourced’ system is partly a reaction to this. Thus, we could expect there to be a backlash against this more deregulated paradigm at some point. Such a dialectic is complicated by the engagement of planning regulation and

systems with development cycles—the reaction against a more or less deregulated system will depend, in part, on whether there is a building boom or recession. The ‘open sourced’ approach has already come under scrutiny but is being introduced at a time when there is little demand for development, which could delay a more fundamental reaction against it. As a final thought, we noted earlier that insurgent spaces and practices tended to proliferate where new, divisive policy regimes are imposed top-down: Watch this space.

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The Greenest Government Ever? Planning and Sustainability in England after the May 2010 Elections

RICHARD COWELL

Richard Cowell, School of City and Regional Planning, Cardiff University, UK.

Abstract

This paper assesses how reforms being introduced in England by the May 2010 Coalition government may affect the capacity of the planning system to promote sustainability. Although moves towards decentralization may allow more innovative local responses to environmental challenges than seemed likely under New Labour, they raise dilemmas of coordination, capacity and accountability for wider, international environmental goals. In certain key respects, the implications of the Coalition's proposals for sustainability and planning echo those of preceding Labour governments. Neither allows planning a major role in more reflexive forms of governance, through which localized challenges to plans and projects can be connected to wider, overarching policy change. Both have sought to increase the emphasis on economic growth in their conception of sustainability.

1. Introduction

Many analysts regard politics and environmental sustainability as having an unsatisfactory relationship, but for contrasting reasons. For some, the vicissitudes of electoral cycles confound the pursuit of long-term environmental commitments that promoting sustainability is deemed to require (Lafferty, 2004). Others, meanwhile, identify the dominant formulation of environmental goals—sustainable development—as emblematic of a post-political world (Swyngedouw, 2007), in which consensual narratives obscure and defuse social conflict around neo-liberal capitalism, social justice and ecological crisis.

Certainly, sustainable development has proved a resilient policy goal, having survived a succession of British governments since its formal endorsement by the Conservatives at the start of the 1990s (HM Government, 1990). While it has been fixed in place by repeated assertion, and inscription in policy documents at all tiers of government, this apparent durability belies almost boundless interpretive flexibility. However, such definitional flexibility does not mean that the particular interpretations being mobilized are without material consequences. Indeed, despite the emollient rhetoric of sustainable development, efforts to mobilize the concept in policy and practice have, in certain contexts, legitimized the pursuit of agendas that are growth-critical (Dierwechter, 2008), acknowledge environmental limits, question the sustainability of particular developmental forms and helped to expose fundamental debates about social needs. Significantly for this paper, it is often when concepts of sustainable development are applied to decisions with ramifications for the use of land—the domain of planning—that irreversible choices become starkly apparent, consensus is prone to break down and sharply divergent values rise to the surface. Questions about the environmental role of planning are thus integral to wider debates about the politics of sustainability.

This paper presents an assessment of how reforms to planning in England¹ introduced by the May 2010 Coalition Government are likely to affect the treatment of sustainability, with a particular focus on environmental dimensions of the concept. The Coalition was formed when the Conservative Party failed to win an outright majority and formed a working agreement with the Liberal Democrats. This paper begins by setting out an analytical framework that seeks to understand how planning has actually served to promote sustainability in the UK since the 1990s.

This framework gives particular emphasis to the wider, more politicized roles of planning in sustainability transitions, and how these emerge from the ‘opportunity structures’ (after Kitschelt, 1986) arranged across the system. The framework is then used to explore the likely effects of the reforms, focusing on the pursuit of localism, the draft National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2011), new development incentives and the decision-making procedures for major projects. Evidence is adduced from key documents released prior to the election (Conservative Party, 2010a, 2010b; Liberal Democrats, 2010) and afterwards, up until September 2011, as well as accompanying Ministerial speeches and announcements. Attention is given to specific policy proposals, but also to the way in which political discourse has constructed the relationship between planning and sustainability and, thereby, the meaning of sustainability itself. The conclusions consider whether the Coalition’s perspective on sustainability and planning is really very different to that of preceding Labour governments, and whether its proposals are likely to endure.

2. Planning and Sustainability—A Conceptual Framework

Numerous reviews attest to the range of ways in the planning system has been used to help improve the sustainability of development (see for example, Davoudi *et al.*, 2009; Owens & Cowell, 2010). By providing locational guidance, planning has helped to steer inappropriate development away from areas of high environmental value, and to channel new buildings towards environmentally advantageous locations, such as sites which best encourage access by public transport or foot. Equally, the planning system has been used to reduce the environmental impact of development schemes by requiring developers to do more to mitigate the impacts of their proposals on a range of environmental parameters, including wildlife, climate change, flood risk (Wilson & Piper, 2010) and landscape.

In noting these positive environmental contributions of planning, it is not being suggested that the impacts have always been significant—often they are minor and incremental—or that the system always serves environmental

protection, or has done so sufficiently to prevent environmental decline. Indeed, planning mechanisms can be limited in their effect where they are working against wider trends in production, consumption and mobility, unsupported by other policy instruments. But noting this contribution alerts us to two points pertinent to the assessment of planning reforms. First, key parts of the environmental role of planning have been underpinned by European Union requirements, such as the Habitats and Birds Directives, which impose stringent, protective requirements on national practices. Concomitantly, in a range of spheres, the scope for new governments to re-frame the relationship between planning and sustainability is constrained by the wider EU context (Wilson, 2009). Second, a proportion of any improvement in the environmental performance of development achieved through planning has emanated from traditional and much-maligned ‘regulatory planning’, rather than much vaunted ‘spatial planning’ of which so much was made under New Labour (Allmendinger, 2011). However, what makes most accounts of planning’s contribution to sustainability insufficient, is the assumption that—through a neat alignment between goals, policies and implementation—the planning system ‘delivers’ sustainability in a straightforward, linear way.

As well as the deliberate pursuit of explicit sustainability goals, the planning system has also played a less narrowly instrumental, more political, one might say subversive role, which warrants greater recognition (Owens & Cowell, 2010). This is because the system provides ‘opportunity structures’—including consultation procedures, environmental assessment requirements and public inquiries—that have allowed the involvement of the public and interest groups. Through such arenas, the planning system has, on occasion, provided venues for contesting the environmental acceptability of particular forms of development, in so doing raising fundamental questions about social needs, the legitimate sphere of market relations, ecological knowledge and environmental values. Moreover, a distinctive feature of the ‘sites of contestation’ provided by planning (Haughton *et al.*, 2010, p. ix) is the scope they offer for cross-scalar argumentation, as criticisms of particular plans and projects are connected to the values embedded in the underlying policies. The debate generated by this scrutiny and resistance can contribute to alternative framings of public policy and policy learning, but also problematize business-as-usual, through the imposition of costs, delays and the ever-present threat of veto. Over

time the accumulation of discursive and material challenges to development trends can gradually loosen the grip of powerful interests, undermine dominant policy discourses and foster acceptance of modes of development with lower environmental impacts. This shows the significance of planning to theorizing about sustainability transition. One might say that the planning system has helped to facilitate reflexivity about societal goals and institutions (Kemp *et al.*, 2005), but it can also work to displace existing, *unsustainable* development—an under-developed dimension of transitions theory (Shove & Walker, 2007; Owens & Cowell, 2010).

To illustrate these arguments, one could observe these dynamics unfolding through the 1980s and 1990s in transport and minerals planning. Public inquiries over projects and plans witnessed repeated and sustained challenges not just to individual roads or quarries but to the ‘predict and provide’ mentality of policies that drove them, in turn refining the argument for alternative approaches which placed greater emphasis on managing demand (whether for road travel or primary aggregates) and fostering less environmentally damaging alternatives. Similar effects can be observed at the time of writing in the aviation field. One could not claim that planning conflicts over airport facilities have led to the wholesale replacement of expansionist policies towards flying with more assertive demand management—far from it; but the difficulties of negotiating repeated challenges to new terminals and runways through the arenas of planning, coupled with tightening environmental conditions, are one factor keeping lower impact transport technologies on the agenda, and have helped with refining arguments for the alternatives (Owens & Cowell, 2010).

Clearly one should not be naïve. As Reade (1987) and others have argued, planning can appear to serve the purpose of closing down threatening conflicts, channelling opposition into the restricted arenas of formal consultation and technical appraisal, thereby insulating policy cores from serious pressure. But the point is that planning has hardly been perfect in realizing such containment: even notionally ‘technical’ procedures have been used to mobilize alternative, more growth-critical conceptions of sustainability, and those that have used the planning system to mount such arguments have often been uninvited and unwelcome. Far from always depoliticizing development through discourses of sustainable development, planning has been a key arena for the politicization of policy (Hajer, 2003), as policies become contextualized in proposals for specific land use

changes and developments, and thus more meaningful to a wider range of audiences. Rather than seeing concepts of sustainable development deflect conflict into consensus around market-led growth we often see, in planning, long-standing conflicts over the environmental acceptability of development re-emerge as struggles around what sustainability should mean, in which hard choices cannot be avoided (Owens & Cowell, 2010; Allmendinger, 2011).

This conceptual framework tries to capture the complex relationship between planning and sustainability, and the ways in which leverage is actually exerted over business as usual. In so doing, it furnishes us with a series of questions which can be used to examine reforms to the system. We need to look not simply at specific measures put forward explicitly to promote more sustainable forms of development, but also at how sustainable development is being interpreted, and whether reforms are likely to enhance the scope for challenging unsustainable development. What opportunity structures for public and interest group involvement are created, who is best placed to access them and what is legitimately open to discussion? The consequences for sustainability cannot, therefore, be read off from any re-allocation of powers between scales. Rather, if we follow Dierwechter (2008, p. 4) in seeing the pursuit of sustainability as an ‘ongoing territorial struggle’, then it is clear that we should look carefully at the governance relations *between* arenas, and how they shape the relationship between policies at different scales, and between policies, plans and projects.

Finally, rather than expecting reforms to be predicated on a unified series of procedural principles, we need to acknowledge (after Jessop, 1997) that modes of governance are intimately connected with particular objects of governance. For some objects, notably housing under New Labour, the state may deploy modes of meta-governance, to strive to ensure the delivery of particular objects across the diverse local arenas of planning; for other objects, the state may be content to allow local decision-makers to go their own way (Cowell & Murdoch, 1999). Paying careful attention to which objects are seen as obligatory and must be delivered, and which are discretionary, may also illuminate how government sees the relationship between sustainability and planning.

3. The May 2010 Planning Reforms

3.1. *Analysing Planning Reforms*

Analysing planning reforms requires caution. Retrospective assessment of government programmes is complicated enough (see Allmendinger, 2011) but, where reforms are still in progress, there are additional levels of uncertainty. Policy programmes are rarely as coherent as the mobilizing discourses of reform may suggest and not all of the rhetoric will translate into concrete actions. At the time of writing (September 2011) not all of the Coalition government's proposals for planning have been fully developed. Some have been dropped or 'paused', while others are being trialled. The Localism Bill that makes provision for many of the reforms is still proceeding through Parliament, and may yet be subject to tactical or practical modifications. Ultimately of course, what is actually implemented—in local plans and development decisions—may not fully reflect the Government's intentions, as the conflicting aspirations of the reforms are interpreted across the different organizational, economic and political settings of planning (Brindley *et al.*, 1996).

Rather than seeing the analytical exercise as unidirectional—charting how planning reform proposals may affect the treatment of environmental sustainability—recent history gives us good reason to expect environmental concerns to impact upon planning reform. At the end of the 1980s, growing public disquiet about development in the countryside and wider environmental issues were among the factors prompting the final Thatcher government to re-think its deregulatory agenda for planning, reverse the proposed abolition of county-level structure plans, and take steps to reinforce the status of development plans in making decisions (Lowe & Flynn, 1989; Ward, 1994). There were numerous instances under New Labour, where attempts to re-cast planning in a more narrowly growthsupporting role were modified, through national-level opportunities for consultation and review, to policy outcomes that allowed more scope for democratic input and acknowledged that 'sustainable growth' should operate 'within environmental limits' (Cowell & Owens, 2006; Wilson, 2009; Owens & Cowell, 2010).

With these caveats in mind, the following assessment focuses on three areas of the Coalition's planning reforms: the implications of localism; interpretations and institutionalization of sustainability, and nationally important infrastructure projects as a special 'object of governance'.

3.2. Localism

A signal feature of the Coalition's proposals is the agenda of localism, which can be summarized as a desire to decentralize power to lower scales of governance; local authorities, social enterprises, 'neighbourhoods' and 'citizens'. At the level of rhetoric at least, this is not wholly novel, but whereas New Labour's aspirations for community engagement often struggled against strong preferences for national regimes of performance management (University of Birmingham Policy Commission, 2011), the Coalition's localism agenda is characterized by proposals to remove mechanisms of central control and coordination. We are seeing the more or less total abolition of regional planning and the removal of national targets, including housing targets and minimum housing densities (a target with the environmental rationale of promoting compact settlements). The Coalition has also taken steps to scale back central government planning policy guidance, as discussed below. At the same time, a host of new powers have been proposed for lower scales of governance. These include giving local authorities a power of general competence, making provision for local referendums, giving neighbours a bigger say in planning decisions and allowing neighbourhoods to prepare their own development plans.

There is not the space here to dwell upon the Coalition's motives for their proposals, except to note that they appear to be driven most overtly by critiques of governing structures, especially Labour's centralizing tendencies, rather than any concerns about the environmental role of planning. Localism seems only to possess an environmental dimension in the realpolitik of electoral advantage and political popularity. Thus, Coalition Ministers have argued that New Labour's hierarchical planning mechanisms imposed development 'on people in a way that... breeds resentment' (Clark, 2010), with much of that resentment emanating from parts of rural England concerned about the loss of countryside to housing development (Wenban-Smith, 2011). Overall, the environmental consequences of development are not a major, direct driver of localism

(indeed, the Coalition sees risks in allowing localism to encourage environmental protection, as discussed below). As an aside, one might reflect that New Labour's regional planning machinery largely failed to make a clear environmental case for its retention. Although the emphasis on collaborative, integrative 'spatial planning' was legitimized in part on its superior capacity to address 'wicked problems' like sustainable development (Tewdwr-Jones *et al.*, 2010), and sometimes generated interesting deliberation, researchers have found 'little evidence... of fundamental differences taking place in the shaping of new development' arising from spatial planning processes (Haughton *et al.*, 2010, p. x; see also Haughton & Counsell, 2004; Allmendinger, 2011).

Whatever the Coalition's intentions, certain theoretical perspectives might give us reasons to be optimistic about the potential of localism to foster environmental sustainability. Venerable strands in eco-political thinking view large, centralized, hierarchical institutions as one of the root causes of unsustainability and social injustice (see discussions in Eckersley, 1992). More practically, giving greater freedom to lower tiers of government may have positive consequences for sustainability, insofar as it facilitates experimentation, the pursuit of locally tailored, contextually-appropriate solutions (see Norgaard, 1994) and allows more creative space for 'organic regeneration' of the type represented by the transitions towns' movement (Evans *et al.*, 2009). Thus, one might have anticipated that the introduction of new freedoms may allow more innovation of the sort seen with, for example, 'Merton Rule policies'. Here, the London Borough of Merton instigated regulatory policies requiring developers to supply a proportion of the energy demands of their projects from on-site renewable energy sources; a policy rapidly then adopted by other councils (TCPA, 2006).

Even if the scope for diversity and innovation increases, localism is not a complete transition theory for sustainability. The distant consequences of local action, whether social or environmental, risk becoming less visible as the scale of planning shrinks; so too may environmental problems that unfold at wider scales. As one could observe with previous planning reforms (Cowell & Owens, 2006), issues that are externalized by the dominant agenda are to be addressed by adding on procedural checks. In this case, the Coalition is introducing a new 'duty to cooperate' between neighbouring local authorities on 'issues that cross administrative

boundaries' (CLG, 2011, para. 44), but it is unclear whether such a duty gives sufficient impetus to resolve the multi-scalar governance challenges of climate change, waste and water management, or biodiversity loss. Indeed, there is potential for dislocation between the localizing of planning and the thrust of the Government's own Natural Environment White Paper (HM Government, 2011), with its call for 'landscape-scale' approaches, to facilitate integrated management of the natural environment. Although the draft National Planning Policy Framework does encourage planning authorities to 'take account of the need to plan for biodiversity at a landscape-scale across local authority boundaries' (CLG, 2011, para. 168); when it comes to implementation, the government places heavy reliance on voluntary partnership between actors around shared 'soft spaces' (Haughton *et al.*, 2010) to fill the vacuum (HM Government, 2011).

Consequently, it is unclear how local experiments in sustainability might 'jump scale' (Cox, 1998) to bring pressure to bear on wider systems of production and consumption that govern resources flows, and which are not readily steered by local actors (Marvin & Guy, 1997). One might also ask 'how can we reproduce success and mitigate failure in a localist system' (University of Birmingham Policy Commission, 2011, p. 6), if government is reducing its interest in national coordination? To return to the Merton rule example, here the local policy innovations derived their initial legitimacy partly from central government policy on climate change and, in turn, the policy learning and economic interest generated at local level fed back into more stringent national guidance on the carbon performance of new buildings (Owens & Cowell, 2010). This then applied to England as a whole, including local authorities with little political interest in climate change.

For a number of reasons, one should not equate local autonomy with agency, or elide responsiveness to local demands with the attainment of higher levels of environmental sustainability. The reforms are being promulgated in the context of economic crisis, including massive cutbacks in public expenditure. The shortterm reality of localism may thus be a communitarian variant of 'negative freedom' (Berlin, 1969), experienced mainly as a 'freedom from' certain forms of external constraint, while the climate of austerity leaves few resources to cultivate 'positive freedom', i.e. poorly-resourced communities may lack the capacities to develop in ways that they wish. Although the Government made financial provisions to kick-

start the use of neighbourhood planning powers, it has also withdrawn support for Planning Aid. Further divergence is a likely outcome. Those places with strong local support for environmental protection and buoyant economies may seize opportunities to promote lower impact forms of development, and feel able to impose the costs on developers, while resisting unattractive projects. There will be other places, where securing development of any form will take priority, regardless of the environmental consequences. The removal of strategic planning arrangements also recasts the opportunity structures for other actors. While the major, more professional environmental NGOs had proved reasonably effective in securing access to regional-level planning (Cowell & Owens, 2006), they may lack the resources to participate regularly in a more radically dispersed planning process, weakening the voice for environment-led conceptions of sustainability.

Ultimately, decentralization measures will affect the kind of deliberations that take place within the planning system. For all the criticisms of the strategic planning machinery developed under Labour, its abolition removes political spaces within the planning system where the question ‘what is the most sustainable solution for the region or nation as a whole?’ can even be asked. This is problematic, to the extent that operationalizing sustainability inevitably raises fundamental questions about need, demand, justice and the acceptability of environmental impacts, which have repercussions for wider political communities, and for which the best answers may not equate to the aggregate consequences of local determinations. Initially at least, Ministers saw divergence in planning policies and outcomes as unproblematic (Clark, 2010). However, as 2010 wore into 2011, it became increasingly clear that the exercise of local autonomy was not to be untrammelled—indeed, securing the roll-out of particular interpretations of sustainability became a key objective of national-to-local coordination.

3.3. Conceptions of Sustainability

Analysts of sustainability semantics may have few reasons to mourn the passing of New Labour’s ‘Panglossian’ (Owens & Cowell, 2010) conception of sustainable development, in which four desiderata—high and stable levels of economic growth, social progress which recognizes the needs of everyone, effective environmental protection and prudent use of

natural resources—were all to be achieved simultaneously (DETR, 1998). Although this interpretation sometimes generated interesting proposals for reconciling these principles, it frequently led to confusion and, at worst, legitimized expedient interpretations that did little to adjust dominant growth trajectories (Haughton & Counsell 2004; Counsell & Haughton, 2006). Subsequent reworking of national sustainability objectives did give greater prominence to ideas of ‘environmental limits’ (HM Government, 2005; ODPM, 2005), but partly at the expense of greater complexity, not least since planning was being pulled at the same time towards an emphasis on relatively conventional growth objectives (see, for example, HM Treasury [Her Majesty’s Treasury] *et al.*, 2007).

Nevertheless, despite the high potential for confusion, the Conservative Party’s pre-election proposal to create a ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development’ for the planning system (Conservative Party 2010b, p. 20) has given an exacting significance to such definitional debates. This concept is at the centre of the draft National Planning Policy Framework (CLG, 2011; hereafter ‘the Framework’). This 58 page document is itself an important innovation—a key device by which the Coalition seeks to implement its goal of streamlining the library of national planning policy guidance that it inherited from Labour. However, perhaps *because* it gave more visibility to the Government’s approach to sustainable development, the Framework, and the construction of this new presumption, attracted a barrage of criticism: from major environmental organizations, planning and other professional bodies, some transport groups (including the RAC) and many local authorities (ENDS, 2011a, 2011d).

These criticisms centre on a number of features. First, the draft Framework offers a strongly pro-development agenda for planning, and an interpretation of sustainable development in which economic growth is pre-eminent. This is evidenced in bald statements like ‘development means growth’ (Ministerial foreword), ‘significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system’ (para. 13) and assertions that growth is a prerequisite to achieving ‘a sustainable future’ (para. 13). Second, the construction of sustainable development sets up stern tests for those seeking to use the planning system to enhance the environmental performance of development, resist problematic schemes or reduce environmental risks. The Framework asserts that planning

authorities should be positive towards development proposals, and meet ‘objectively assessed development needs... unless the adverse impacts of allowing development would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits’ (para. 14, emphasis added). As commentators have long been aware (Jewell, 1995), allocating the burden of proof in this way makes challenging unsustainable development difficult. In the past, local planning authorities have proved reluctant to take determinate action to promote less environmentallydamaging development where the science is inconclusive, fearing legal challenge, until legitimized in doing so by central government (Counsell, 1998; Wilson, 2006).

It thus matters a great deal which environmental dimensions receive national endorsement, to constitute a legitimate interpretation of what is (un)sustainable. Consequently, numerous criticisms of the draft Framework focused on the massive simplification of guidance which—by design or neglect—led to the loss of important environmental principles, or to their heavy qualification by concerns for the ‘viability’ of development, practicality or reasonableness (CLG, 2011, p. 39). For example, the planning system is to promote patterns of development that facilitate sustainable modes of transport, but only ‘where reasonable to do so’ (CLG, 2011, p. 21). Critics saw environmental threats in the removal of the priority given to brownfield sites for regeneration over greenfield sites, and the dilution of the principle of ‘town centre first’ when identifying sites for tripgenerating office developments (ENDS, 2011b, 2011c). The language of ‘needs’ is attached liberally to dimensions of economic growth and development, including retail and leisure, less so to other social and environmental concerns.

That is not to say that the Framework ignores environmental protection. There are firm statements encouraging use of the planning system to protect nationally-designated landscapes, nationallyand internationally-designated wildlife sites, green belt, open spaces and playing fields; for example, ‘development likely to have a significant effect on sites protected under the Birds and Habitats Directive would not be sustainable’ (CLG, 2011, para. 16). The proposed policies also exhort the planning system to help ‘secure... radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions’ by, *inter alia*, helping ‘increase the use and supply of renewable and low carbon energy’ and ‘avoid increased vulnerability to impacts arising from climate change’ (CLG, 2011, pp. 42–43). However, with the exception of ‘irreplaceable

habitats' like ancient woodlands and the new protectable category of 'Local Green Space' (CLG, 2011, p. 37), the environmental objects to which greatest weight is to be attached are those backed by national and international policies. So, for example, planning authorities seeking to follow Merton, by driving forward local improvements to the environmental performance of buildings, must now 'do so in a way consistent with the Government's zero carbon buildings policy and adopt nationally described standards' (p. 42). To this extent, the Framework specifies the environment parameters *within which* localism is to unfold.

Through the Framework, the Coalition is seeking to undergird the narrative line that the Conservative Party in particular has used to connect localism and growth. Ministers have claimed that a combination of greater autonomy *per se*, and specific incentives, will unleash a desire to enable development. Thus:

'When people know that they will get proper support to cope with the demands of new development; when they have a proper say over what new homes will look like; and when they can influence where those homes go, they have reasons to say "yes" to growth' (Clark, 2010, p. 4)

The assumption that the freedoms of localism would in itself cultivate a more accommodating stance towards development, by enabling people to 'specify what kind of development they want to see in their area' (Conservative Party, 2010a, p. 73), was always questionable. The draft Framework can, therefore, be read as a device for exercising meta-governance, through which the Coalition Government seeks to align localism with development, by conferring minimal legitimacy on the use of local planning processes to pursue more stringent, regulatory criteria for environmental sustainability.

Another important part of the reforms is the deployment of 'nudge tactics' to incentivize the accommodation of development which, in their strategic selectivity, help to reveal which objects are politically important to the Coalition and the extent to which they have any environmental content. The Coalition has persisted with Labour's ideas for a Community Infrastructure Levy, through which developers make financial contributions towards improving local infrastructure. Potentially this levy could be used to fund environmental enhancement (CLG, 2011, para. 18), but the main policy narrative has been one of facilitating development: such incentives

are to help manage the impacts of development and thus give communities ‘more reason to accept development in the first place’ (Clark, 2010, p. 6). The delivery of housing is supported by proposals for the New Homes Bonus, whereby central funds will match the additional council tax raised over the following six years for new homes completed, with an additional amount for affordable homes. Expanding renewable energy generation is still acknowledged to be vital to sustainable development, and the Coalition has proposed that local authorities that accommodate such facilities will be able to retain the business rates for six years.² In the field of nature conservation, the Coalition is seeking to pilot a system of ‘biodiversity off-setting’ (HM Government, 2011, p. 22). This is not really a ‘nudge’ tactic but shares some qualities of market-based instruments, in that it requires developers to make payments, at rate reflective of the biodiversity impacts of their proposals, to support compensatory ecological enhancement of the wider landscape.

‘Pricing’ externalities and letting decision-makers choose how to respond inevitably creates uncertainty of outcome. Tendencies towards divergence between localities keen to attract any development and those able to be more choosy may be further reinforced, especially given that money from developers may be the only way, in a climate of austerity, of gaining funding for key local projects. The use of incentives in the exercise of planning control also raises enduring questions about whether the environmental acceptability of development is something that can be traded for the right fee,³ or whether achieving sustainability simply requires the efficient balancing of economic costs and benefits (Pearce *et al.*, 1989). It is an open question, therefore, whether these incentives will deliver outcomes that are socially and environmentally desirable at a wider scale.

3.4. Major Projects—More Limits on Localism?

As with New Labour, all the Coalition Government’s rhetoric about local engagement peters out when faced with ‘nationally important infrastructure projects’, such as large power stations, electricity grid lines and ports. This is a vital category of development for sustainability, as such projects not only have major environmental impacts in themselves, but are integral to the reproduction of wider systems of production, consumption and mobility. It is significant, therefore, that the Coalition Government has largely

retained the reforms introduced by Labour in the Planning Act 2008, which closely confine the interface between the arenas of planning and wider questions of sustainability.

There is not the space here for a detailed review (see Owens and Cowell, 2010; Marshall, 2011), but the main goal of the planning procedures for major projects is to reduce delay and uncertainty through the deployment of a special, 'streamlined' consenting system. Following the Planning Act 2008, decisions on major projects no longer go through a public inquiry but are taken by a new, independent body, the infrastructure planning commission (IPC), which holds an examination in public but works to a strict timetable. Central Government is responsible for drawing up National Planning Statements, which are designed to determine questions of need and how costs and benefits are to be weighed against each other; the principle being that it is not normally then permissible for such issues to be reopened in project-specific inquiries. The Coalition is abolishing the IPC but will retain special, streamlined procedures: applications will instead be assessed by a new unit of the Planning Inspectorate with decisions reverting to being taken by Ministers. The Coalition government has also retained the system of National Planning Statements (draft statements on energy were released by Labour before the election), but has required that such statements receive Parliamentary approval.

These modifications have been justified as increasing political accountability and giving a greater role for Parliamentary democracy than under Labour's system. However, the modified procedures retain a number of problematic assumptions, such that their implications for the relationship between planning and sustainability are little changed (Owens & Cowell, 2010). It is still assumed that the desirability of certain major facilities could be determined in a way which is enduring, *a priori* to, and largely insulated from concerns about the environmental consequences that may arise from individual projects. This reproduces the belief that the planning system, beyond any consultative procedures surrounding National Policy Statements, cannot generate useful debate about the need or desirability of certain forms of infrastructure. It also risks severing the kind of alliances between localized opposition and national actors that have previously been influential in challenging dominant development trajectories and prevents planning arenas providing a contextualized setting for the deliberation of policy. Indeed, the intention is precisely to avoid 'the protracted

examination of conflicting views on national policy' (Conservative Party, 2010a, p. 14).

Of course, one must acknowledge the imperfections of the old public inquiry as a deliberative arena. Some would also claim that it is better that key issues of infrastructural need are debated at national level. One might accept some force to these arguments were it not the fact that the mobilizing discourses for new procedures for major projects have been essentially narrow, economic and instrumental. As under New Labour, the Coalition has justified accelerated procedures as vital in order swiftly to give consent for infrastructure that the government believes is necessary for economic competitiveness (see for example, Clark, 2010, p. 2). Rarely have the new procedures been represented as a more democratic or effective means of deliberating whether or not certain infrastructural forms are desirable, or sustainable. For certain categories of development, concerns for environmental sustainability have reinforced the argument for accelerating decision-times, notably the promotion of 'low carbon energy' infrastructure. While there is genuine urgency in the need to tackle climate change, there remain important, legitimate questions about what kind of low carbon future is most desirable: whether, for example, to favour large-scale energy-generating infrastructure (including nuclear power) or place greater emphasis on restructuring consumption. However, the National Policy Statement on energy makes it clear that the desirability of particular technologies is not up for discussion as individual projects come forward. The Government also resisted calls for allowing the consenting regime to 'test' proposed energy generating facilities against the stringent emissions reductions required to meet the carbon budgets, prescribed by the 2008 Climate Change Act (DECC, 2011). Key decisions on the environmental acceptability of energy developments have thus been disconnected from planning and deferred to market actors, to decide in the light of market-based instruments like the EU Emissions Trading Scheme.

At the time of writing, it is too soon to tell whether the major projects procedures will attain an enduring legitimacy. The production of National Policy Statements and new consenting regime do create new apertures for national-level engagement, but have been criticized as inadequate for deliberating the scale of risks that most major infrastructure entails (House of Commons Energy and Climate Change Committee, 2010). At other levels in the planning system, as under Labour, the Coalition is placing

great faith in pre-application consultation as a means of securing legitimacy and fostering public support for infrastructure projects. Yet this makes the heroic assumption that public concerns about infrastructure are essentially local, project-specific, amenable to managerial solutions and will not lead quickly to questions about the underlying rationale for the proposed infrastructure. Indeed, the whole of the Coalition's reforms have inherited Labour's doubtful localizing discourse of public engagement in planning (Cowell & Owens, 2006). This framing around the local and the particular, with its inward-focus on physical appearances, is apparent from claims that, through planning, '(l)ocal people come together and agree, "this is what we want our area to look like"' (Clark, 2010, p. 6); or decentralizing planning will 'give neighbourhoods far more ability to influence the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live' (Cabinet Office, 2010). The Conservative Party's 'Invitation to join the government of Britain' is not extended to people wishing to gatecrash policy debates through the decision-making processes for major projects.

For all that the Coalition appears to place great store by democracy, their reforms of decision-making procedures for major projects reflect a wider concentration of public debate on national representative democracy alongside a containment of mechanisms for expressing dissent. In the 2010 public spending review, the Coalition withdrew funding from the Sustainable Development Commission (an arms-length body, set up to hold the government to account on its sustainability performance) and abolished the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution which, for over 30 years, had been providing independent analysis of key environmental policy issues. Overall, the impression is created that the Coalition government sees informed, external criticism of the way that sustainability is addressed as a luxury that we no longer need and cannot, in a recession, afford (see also ENDS, 2010).

The sustainability credentials of any development trajectories that emerge may thus depend significantly on which forms of infrastructure the Coalition government comes to regard as nationally important. One positive and ironic example is airport infrastructure. The example is positive for environmental sustainability to the extent that some Conservative ministers have been taking a more critical stance towards airport expansion than their Labour predecessors and, with it, to the prospects of aviation growth being rendered sustainable purely by more ecoefficient aircraft technology

(Villiers, 2009). What makes it ironic is that the Conservative's position has been informed by environmental concerns and planning conflicts surrounding the expansion of London's airports, in which debates about the global sustainability impacts of aviation have been interconnected with local environmental concerns. Much of the argument has been played out and refined through public inquiries over particular facilities—a procedure which is now defunct.

4. Conclusions

Despite coming to power amidst aspirations to be 'the greenest government ever',⁴ the Coalition's reforms to the planning system have clearly not been driven by concerns about environmental sustainability. Indeed, the overall effect could be summarized as seeking to reduce or contain the environmental role of planning. The emerging 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' has been constructed to privilege economic growth. As elsewhere in Europe, there has been little traction to the argument that, in a recession when resources are scarce, society has even greater need for mechanisms for making good, long-term choices (Van der Kooji, 2011) to ensure that development better addresses the challenges of climate change, social fairness and peak oil. The potential for environmental innovation to arise from the localism agenda is vitiated by the lack of public resources, and the government's evident desire not to see local freedoms deployed in ways which might restrict economic or property development, except in spheres underpinned by national environmental policies. One might conclude that planning and sustainability have both been curtailed—individually and in conjunction—by hostile ideologies of 'state shrinkage' (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2011) now abroad in the Conservative Party (ENDS, 2011e), and abetted by sections of the media (Burke, 2011).

The consensus view on the Coalition government's proposals for planning is that they represent a radical break with the past but, when we focus on the relationship between planning and sustainability, there are elements of continuity with the previous Labour governments. Both have been prone to the simplistic representation of planning as a 'barrier to

growth and wealth creation’, a reflection perhaps of persistent power of the Treasury and a pervasive economic competitiveness agenda (Wenban-Smith, 2011). Both New Labour and the Coalition have represented planning as slow and complicated, but have been unwilling to attribute this to the fact that the issues and interests that legitimately require consideration are inherently complex and conflictual. Both governments have exhibited the tendency to believe that this complexity can readily be managed away, and conflict turned into consensus, by seeking simplification and re-scaling. Neither has wished to see planning as a valuable if imperfect set of arrangements for wider policy learning within the state, which is useful precisely because it tests national policy in the light of its implications for specific places and environments, and allows cross-scalar deliberation of developmental alternatives. Both governments have pursued decision-making procedures designed to insulate the development of major infrastructure from challenges arising as individual project proposals come forward. The Coalition could be seen as extending this, not simply by cutting back strategic planning, but also—through its draft National Planning Policy Framework—by trying to contain the environmental objects that can legitimately be deployed to define what makes development sustainable.

These continuities across political parties might be grist to the mill of analysts that see discourses of sustainable development as post-political—massaging consent for, and thereby depoliticizing, fundamental questions about justice, markets, environments and the public sphere. Yet the reforms have scarcely been consensual, and conflicts about the interpretation and institutionalization of sustainability in planning in particular have exposed strongly divergent views. Indeed, the nakedness with which the Coalition has attempted to render (environmental) sustainability subordinate to (economic) development arguably exacerbated the reaction.

The last two decades suggest that attempts to institutionalize sustainability objectives in planning tend to be temporary and problematic fixes, as governments at all levels grapple with enduring tensions about the negotiability of environmental conditions in the face of pressures for growth (Owens & Cowell, 2010). Given these challenges—and the inevitable reliance of the Government on discursive constructs to give coherence to the reform proposals—the final question to reflect upon is will the reforms ‘stick’ to exercise any enduring effect on development

trajectories? There are many uncertainties. The most immediate is the future of coalition government, with the Liberal Democrats—were they not bound into a coalition agreement with the Conservatives—previously aligning themselves with a more ecological, environment-led conception of sustainability for planning (Fessey, 2010). Then, there is the issue of electoral support. As in the 1980s, the Conservatives face electoral reasons for preventing a pro-development ethos from re-negotiating particular environmental constraints, notably in areas of valued countryside at ‘the interface between the urban and the rural – the greenbelt and the commuterbelt’ (Lowe & Flynn, 1989, p. 261). Few Conservative voters in such areas would have anticipated that the removal of national housing targets would be replaced by a different set of arrangements for promoting growth. The Chancellor and other Ministers have been adamant that they will not let the welter of criticism deflect their desire to reform the planning system. Nevertheless, even if the National Planning Policy Framework is published largely unchanged, one could hypothesize that the numerous concerns it has engendered will re-emerge in other arenas, both within the planning process (in plan-making, assessments of development need, or in the courts) or beyond. Although the Coalition has been supported in its reforms by powerful developer and property interests (ENDS, 2011d), one also needs to consider whether other economic sectors, more supportive of planning and environmental regulation—including renewable energy and energy equipment businesses—will provide a counter-balance.

To what extent will the need to address environmental problems—currently drowned out by the dominant agenda of economic crisis—eventually re-emerge to ‘rescue’ planning, as happened in the late 1980s? After all, environmental impacts do not disappear just because institutional changes promoted for other reasons make them less visible or tractable. The need to respond to the myriad, cross-scalar environmental side-effects of development may yet thwart the Coalition government’s desire for simplification, as occurred with previous reforms (Cowell and Owens, 2006), and further qualify moves towards localism. A key challenge for the Government will be articulating the fragmented governance territory it seeks to create with a range of environmental policy goals—including greenhouse gas reductions, renewable energy targets and reversing biodiversity loss—many of them backed by national and European legislation. As with previous neo-liberal administrations, the Coalition

government may find that environmental regulation is difficult to roll back (Yeager, 1991), and demands an effective institutional response. How far the Coalition government would be prepared to give planning a key role in any future environmental governance architecture—given the frequency with which they have denigrated it—remains to be seen.

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Notes

1. Given the significant degree of devolution of planning powers within the British state, most of the reform proposals discussed here apply mainly to England. The Welsh Assembly does not have powers to enact primary legislation, thus some—but not all—aspects of the Localism Bill also apply in Wales (National Assembly for Wales, 2011).
2. Other freedoms and policy reforms will combine to enable local authorities to generate electricity themselves and sell it back to the grid.
3. Noting that the system of ‘biodiversity offsets’ is to support ecological enhancement of the *wider* landscape, not supplant strict protection of important wildlife areas.
4. A claim attributed to David Cameron, Prime Minister, 14 May 2010, speech to DECC civil servants. Available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2010/may/14/cameron-wants-greenest-government-ever> (accessed 6 December 2011).

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The New Contractualism, the Privatization of the Welfare State, and the Barriers to Open Source Planning

MIKE RACO

Mike Raco, Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, UK.

Abstract

This paper argues that the UK government's Open Source Planning reforms are founded on a caricatured vision of state–society relationships. Simple binaries are deployed that present political power as a zero-sum game with 'communities' on the one side and state 'bureaucracies' on the other. There has been little recognition of the complex public–private sector entanglements left by the previous Labour government and the power of the 'new contractualism' in shaping the provision and ownership of welfare services and assets. The paper assesses the legacies of privatization under Labour and the structural limits that contracts and private financing now put on the governance and management of the welfare state and the planning system. It contends that the principle sources of state power and accountability that underpinned the post-war settlement are being eroded. Paradoxically, this will not devolve power to local communities and citizens but create new forms of distancing and disempowerment.

Introduction

For the UK's Coalition government,¹ the planning system exemplifies all that is wrong with the post-war welfare state and its tendency to interfere with the everyday lives of ordinary people and the communities in which they live (see Pennington, 2006). The Open Source Planning (OSP) Green Paper characterizes the system as 'almost wholly negative and adversarial. It creates bureaucratic barriers rather than enabling communities to formulate a positive vision of their future development' (p. 1). These are sentiments that have subsequently resurfaced in the *Localism Bill 2011* and consultations over the *National Planning Policy Framework*. Whilst much of this rhetoric is ostensibly very familiar, the broader attack on target setting frameworks and plan-making structures is genuinely radical in form. Moreover, there is a wider critique here; that of the very *legitimacy* of planners and the post-war planning system as a whole. This represents a major departure from earlier rounds of modernization that sought to make planning and planners more engaged and community-responsive (see Clifford, 2007). A truly democratic and accountable system of planning, it is argued, rests instead on thinning out state bureaucracies and rolling out a new system of devolved localism (see Pickles, 2010a; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2011). A leaner state, shorn of its post-war welfare functions, can act as 'a leading force for progress in social responsibility...by breaking [open] state monopolies, allowing charities, social enterprises, and companies to provide public services, devolving power down to neighbourhoods, making government more accountable' (Cameron, 2010a: p. 1).

However, within this broader anti-statist, anti-bureaucratic rhetoric, one core aspect of the previous Labour government's changes to the welfare state has been barely discussed yet threatens to undermine the longer-term ambitions of the localist agenda (see Norman, 2011). During the 1990s and 2000s, the process of *privatization* expanded relentlessly so that companies not only took control of a wider range of contracted-out services but also began to build and lease-out much of the physical infrastructure on which community services depend. The sector took on new roles and responsibilities in areas that had previously been managed by the state planning system and elected local authorities. As this paper will argue, the assumption made by the Coalition government, and one that is often made by academics and researchers, is that empowerment is primarily a zero-sum game with power residing either with communities or state bureaucracies. Such an approach underestimates the complex *entanglements* that now exist between and within the state, the private sector, and communities and the implications of this for the politics of place-

building and the planning system as a whole. Thus, under the rhetoric of OSP, communities are ‘being empowered’ at a time when their capacities *and* the capacities of state actors have been systematically undermined by privatization, and the regulatory complexities and contractualism that go with it.

This, it is argued, has significant implications for planning both as a process and a policy field. Planning has traditionally acted as a mechanism through which politically defined public interests and values are protected. This is achieved, primarily, through the integration and co-ordination of welfare services and public infrastructure provision across space. This, in turns, relies upon the existence of meaningful and accountable political and institutional structures that provide state actors, elected policy-makers, and communities with resources and the capacities for action (see Healey, 2002). As the discussion will show, this traditional role for the planning system is seriously undermined by a combination of the localism agenda and privatization. If contracts are established that protect private interests from community demands and aspirations, then the responsiveness and accountability of the planning system and the welfare state are systematically eroded. The rolling out of the localism agenda in this context may make things worse by promising to deliver empowerment in a context where community power and influence are increasingly ebbing away.

The paper explores some of the pervasive legacies left by a Labour government that was driven by a ‘non-ideological’ philosophy of what matters is what works. It argues that one of the paradoxes of its modernization programmes was that in seeking to remove political interference from management decisions, reforms undermined the ability of citizens to directly influence and change many of the services on which they rely. The discussion begins by discussing the rise of Third Way thinking, and its influence on the agendas of the former Labour government and the Coalition. It then interrogates the form and character of privatization in the UK and the rise of what Yeatman (2002) terms the ‘new contractualism’ in the running of welfare services and the ownership of state assets. A third section then turns to the example of welfare provision in South East London, with a particular focus on health and transport as key policy fields where privatization is having a significant impact on the politics of community empowerment. A final section concludes by discussing some of the key policy and research implications raised by the paper’s findings.

Welfare Reform and the Third Way

During the period 1997–2010, the Labour government instigated some of the most significant reforms seen to the welfare state since its creation in the 1940s. Under the banner of Third Way governance, the core philosophy for service provision became one of ‘effectiveness’, or in Tony Blair’s terms ‘what matters is what works to give effect to our values’ (Blair, 1998; cited in Jacobs, 2001). The welfare state, it was argued, should reflect wider socio-economic changes in which individuals no longer saw themselves as part of collective class identities, as they had in earlier periods, but instead acted and thought like individual consumers, purchasing goods and services most appropriate to their needs. The public sector as a whole had to reform in order to ‘offer individuals and communities the choice and quality of service that modern consumers expect and demand’ (DCLG, 2007: p. 4). State bodies should, therefore, seek to model themselves on an imagined private sector and adopt the latter’s output-focused ethos, efficiencies, and ways of working.

These changes were part of a broader trend towards what Beck (2006) terms the ‘individualization’ of society, or the shift towards modes of ‘sub-politics’ dominated by the consensual language of partnership working, participation, community empowerment, and voluntarism (see also Etzioni, 1999; Giddens, 2000, 2002, 2007). According to this group of Third Way writers, such welfare reforms were necessary to reflect and reproduce unstoppable changes that have been taking place in the organization and outlooks of modern societies. Policy reform became dominated by the assumption that a single, global neo-liberal order exists to which communities and state systems have no choice but to adapt (see also Brock & Bridghouse, 2005; Held, 2005; Appiah, 2006). As societies no longer possess the divisive undercurrents associated with class tensions, a focus on consensus-building and pragmatism seemed to offer an alternative and more responsive mode of governance than those that preceded them.

The implications for governance and state action of these transformations are profound as, according to Beck (2000: p. 80), existing institutional structures and the bureaucracies of representative governance now act like ‘zombies – dead long ago but still haunting people’s minds’. The very character of politics thus changes, with conflict giving way to pragmatic forms of consensus-building. Political interests explicitly adopt ‘non-ideological’ political stances, focusing on the needs of aspirational groups and communities. In his recent memoirs Tony Blair (2010a) still adopts this Third

Way rhetoric to justify his programmes and argues that his government did not go far enough in reforming the welfare state and personalising welfare provision and choice to a greater degree; 'I am still an advocate of Third Way politics... a concept of reformed and reinvented government that is where myself and Bill Clinton were in the early 21st Century that I still think is the right idea' (p. 1).

The emergence of the Coalition government's reform agendas makes many of the same assumptions that drove change under Labour. It is underpinned by a particular vision of an 'out-dated', overly traditional state system, whose structure, *modus operandi*, functions, and mechanisms of engagement with civil society fail to reflect the post-ideological needs and aspirations of modern consumer-citizens. The central tenet of the Coalition government's critique is that the state has become too big and that the role of a 'radically reformed planning system' should be to 'give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live' (Cabinet Office, 2010: p. 11). This, it is argued, will empower and give additional responsibilities to a reinvigorated voluntary and community sector, with the Coalition looking to devolve government resources away from central and local state agencies to 'support the creation of mutual, cooperatives, charities, and social enterprises, and enable these groups to have a much greater involvement in the running of public services' (p. 29). Under such plans, the *local* thus becomes an arena for the rolling out of new agendas. In direct echoes of the writing of Giddens, Beck, and others, local communities and citizens, it is argued, do not wish to be restricted by a planning system that is wedded to old-fashioned myths that something called a collective public interest exists and can be identified and given state backing. In short, the hollowing out of state power becomes equated with a rise in individual freedom, the removal of barriers to action, and a greater congruence between the ways in which modern citizens think and act and the organization of the state system.

And yet, the paradox of such imaginaries is that in seeking to create a responsive, consumer-driven welfare and planning system, Labour's reforms only succeeded in establishing new complexities, public-private entanglements, and longer-term rigidities in the structures of welfare delivery. The role of the state has thus changed significantly with welfare policy-making powers and resources handed over to private sector and voluntary providers. The government's characterization of allpowerful, centralized bureaucracies underestimates the extent to which Labour's programmes undermined the power of such bodies during the 2000s and fundamentally reshaped their

ownership and accountability structures. In many cases, their responsibilities were transferred to the companies who deliver welfare services and the teams of experts, lawyers, and regulators who have become involved in the drawing up of contracts. The 1990s and 2000s thus witnessed the proliferation of what Yeatman (2002) terms a ‘new contractualism’, or a social order founded on the production of contracts of exchange as the key medium through which state practices operate. The next section of the paper now turns explicitly to the character of these processes and the implications for the Coalition’s planning reforms.

The New Contractualism, the Privatization of Welfare, and the Planning System

The history of modern government in the UK and elsewhere, demonstrates a recurring tendency on the part of policy-makers to devolve difficult and contentious decisions and responsibilities to non-governmental agents and organizations (see Hood, 2001; Cochrane, 2007). However, since the 1980s, this rationality of ‘distancing’ has also been used to justify the privatization of large parts of the welfare state. Such a process involves government taking on a facilitating role in setting the frameworks through which policy is delivered, rather than directly managing and providing the services themselves. In many instances, the government may also set up regulatory quangos to regulate the activities, powers, and decisions of other non-governmental actors, thus creating complex new policy networks through which decisions are enacted, to the extent that some commentators now refer to the rise of the ‘regulatory state’ (see Braithwaite, 2008; Levi-Faur, 2011).

Perhaps the most significant change has been a shift in the character of privatization. Since the early 1990s, the sector’s role has expanded from contracted-out service provision to include the ownership, construction, and management of public sector assets and their conversion into investment opportunities. This expansion has been propagated through a ‘new contractualism’, as noted above, in which governance is increasingly organized and managed through a process of legally binding contract writing (see Ramia, 2002; Yeatman, 2002). The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a contract as ‘a business agreement for the supply of certain articles or the performance of

specified work at a certain price, rate, or commission’, and this definition accurately captures the character of recent reforms.

The most far-reaching example of this is the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which Edwards (2009: p. 15) describes as:

‘a scheme under which private companies not only build new facilities, but also finance them and then rent them back to the Government...the essence of PFI is that the private sector not only designs, builds and operates, but also finances the facilities – and all of this under long-term contracts, generally of at least 30 years or more’.

The PFI was originally instigated by the Major government in the early 1990s to finance capital projects, such as road and hospital building in the midst of a relatively deep recession where government receipts were falling. From then on, it became a tempting option for governments intent on ‘investing’ in infrastructure in the short term, and leaving future governments and citizens to pay for this investment in the long term, almost always at higher cost. It was with the election of the Blair administration in 1997 that the PFI became a dominant part of a ‘modernized’ public sector. It presented the government with an opportunity to showcase the ways in which the state could work hand-in-hand with business to deliver projects and services in the wider ‘public interest’. At the same time, it also opened up new funding streams for a government that was desperate to avoid raising taxes or increasing the public debt in the short term beyond a maximum ceiling of 40% of gross domestic product (GDP)². The PFI’s short-term political appeal is that it enables governments to deliver new public infrastructure relatively quickly, whilst transferring the financial costs on to future governments and taxpayers. It is a model of partnership working that is expanding internationally, with significant implications for planners, policy communities, and democratic governance (see Hellowell & Pollock, 2009).

For the private sector, the PFI established important new avenues through which to channel financial investments at relatively low risk. As Murphy (2011) argues, the privatization of European welfare states represents perhaps the biggest investment opportunity for multi-national corporations and international financial bodies to be found anywhere in the world. Under pressure from global trading bodies and big business, governments have looked for new ways to break-up welfare bureaucracies and sell off their functions. The scale of the commercial opportunities across the EU is colossal. In UK alone, the total value of existing PFI repayments on assets and services is already over £260 billion (see Monbiot, 2009; Treasury, 2011). Given that

private sector investment is almost always charged at a higher market rate than government finance, critics claim that such projects often represent very poor value for money for the public sector (see Parker and Hartley, 2002; Spackman, 2002; Edwards, 2009). Whilst this is contested by government and some analysts (see HM Treasury, 2006; Allen Consulting, 2007), the key point is that fundamental political questions over the resourcing of public sector infrastructure have become matters for financial experts and officials. And as will be discussed below in relation to healthcare and public transport, whatever the economic arguments over the costs of financial repayments, the generous guarantees provided to investors under such schemes through contracts effectively transfer the risks for cost overruns or service failures on to the public sector and user-communities. Contractual agreements often contain within them Abstract and technical terms such as ‘revenue-protection’ that disguise the true extent of such transfers.

The implications of this transfer of resources and assets to the private sector for how we might understand what is meant by the ‘state’, and the barriers this creates for the rolling out of an OSP agenda, are profound. Any shift towards contractual private provision is often *inflexible* and limits the ability of welfare service providers, and by extension local communities, to reform public services to meet new demands. Moreover, in the process of drawing up contracts, the specifications around which such agreements are made are fraught with complexity and opacity. New dichotomies are created between fixed legal and financial commitments on the one hand, and fluid social, political, and economic processes on the other. As Pollock (2006: p. 46) observes, ‘the sheer complexity of establishing in fine print all the elements involved in all the contingencies that may arise’ makes the process of drawing up contracts a costly and contentious business. Indeed, one of the arguments put forward by advocates of the PFI has been that private sector companies require long-term ‘certainty’ in order to invest. Under pressure from the Treasury, government bodies have, therefore, been forced to draw up long-term contracts that will provide guaranteed returns. This effectively front-loads decisionmaking processes by setting out long-term conditions of obligation, which in the case of many PFIs last for up to 30 years. Thus decisions taken by lawyers, regulators, experts, and elected politicians at a *particular moment in time* become institutionalized through complex and rigid legal frameworks and regulatory mechanisms.

At a stroke, this form of privatization inverts the political process and limits the power of user-communities, citizens, and even elected politicians, to set the priorities of existing and future service provision. In the place of elected

scrutiny, contracts are negotiated by experts and officials, with public sector representatives often turning to private sector consultancies for 'guidance'. Under the cover of commercial confidentiality, the final contracts usually contain penalty clauses so that later amendments to cater for changing needs or community priorities become prohibitively expensive. The net effect is that contract 're-negotiations' lead to massive transfers of local and central state resources away from welfare provision and into private hands.³ Moreover, contracts are explicitly designed to be 'politically-neutral' and are designed to be 'free' from the political interference of newly elected governments, or active community groups and individuals. They are created to be 'objective' documents that should only be accountable to judicial forms of scrutiny. Thus, the election of a new government and/or the 'empowerment' of local communities to take a bigger stake in the running of such services becomes structurally limited, ordered, and controlled so that democratic accountability does not get in the way of operational efficiency and the ability of businesses and investors to extract resources from the welfare state over the longer term.

The Coalition government has been unwilling to tackle these structural barriers to political empowerment, for to do so would require recognition that the limits of the planning system are not *primarily* a consequence of overpowerful bureaucracies. To try and unpick the complexities and entanglements that now dominate the welfare policy-making landscape would also require a rejection of privatism, at a time when the private sector is being presented as a role model for wider welfare reforms. There is thus little or no recognition given to the difficulties that private sector asset ownership and contractual service provision will have on the aspiration 'to create a genuinely responsive service' through the devolution of power 'to those who are directly affected by that service' (Conservative Party, 2010: p. 5). Instead, there is a tendency to isolate planning as a separate sphere of activity that is always in opposition to devolved, community-centred localism.

The next section now uses the examples of health care provision and public transport policy to exemplify some of the legacies left by the Labour government's privatization programmes. These sectors represent core services for all communities and if the OSP and localist agendas are to have an impact, then it is exactly these sorts of public services that will need to be brought under local control and made responsible to changing community needs. Drawing on specific examples from South East London, the discussion highlights some of the contradictions and tensions within the new agendas, before moving on to future research agendas.

Health Care, Private Finance and Place Planning

Access to health care is one of the cornerstones of the British welfare state and a key component of development planning (Mohan, 2004). This is reflected by the fact that despite the austerity cuts, health spending in the UK in 2014–2015 will still be £109.8 billion, the largest of any department of the government (HM Treasury, 2010). The management and organization of the UK's National Health Service [NHS] will, therefore, have a significant impact on the planning of places and the veracity and legitimacy of the OSP agenda. Health service provision, particularly in relation to infrastructure, is also one of the areas that has been the biggest recipient of PFI schemes. Health care managers, planners, and policymakers working at the local level, face growing demands to meet the spiralling costs, liabilities, and inflexible priorities left by earlier rounds of privatization and existing PFI projects. A *Sunday Telegraph* investigation in 2009, for instance, found that the total debt owed by Hospital Trusts in England to PFI developers and investors was approximately £60 billion (see Donnelley and Ball, 2009). This burden has inevitably led to the 'axing of other services so they [NHS Trusts] can keep paying contractors debts which will run for decades' (p. 2). The net result is the imposition of a financial straight-jacket on health care managers which limits their ability to adapt to local clinical needs and demands.⁴

The politics of healthcare in South East London exemplifies some of these wider trends and represents a microcosm of the challenges that will be faced by all health authorities and communities across the country in the coming decade. Clinical decisions have become embedded in an institutional mire of privatization, restrictive contracts, shifting costs, changing health care needs, and community lobbying. The South London NHS Trust owns six hospital sites, three of which have been the recipients of PFI building projects. [Figure 1](#) is based on Treasury data and documents the re-payment schedules. Collectively these add up to a remarkable £2.271 billion to be paid back by 2039. The repayment costs are 'backloaded' so that they rise over a period of time on the 'expectation' that government spending on health care will also increase, in line with longer-term trends and inflation. However, in the wake of the credit crunch, the government's austerity measures, and the market-driven reforms outlined above, the resources given to local health authorities in the short to medium term will almost certainly fall well below these expectations. The financial risks associated with these cut-backs will then be transferred on

to public sector providers under contract, rather than the private sector investors whose income is guaranteed.

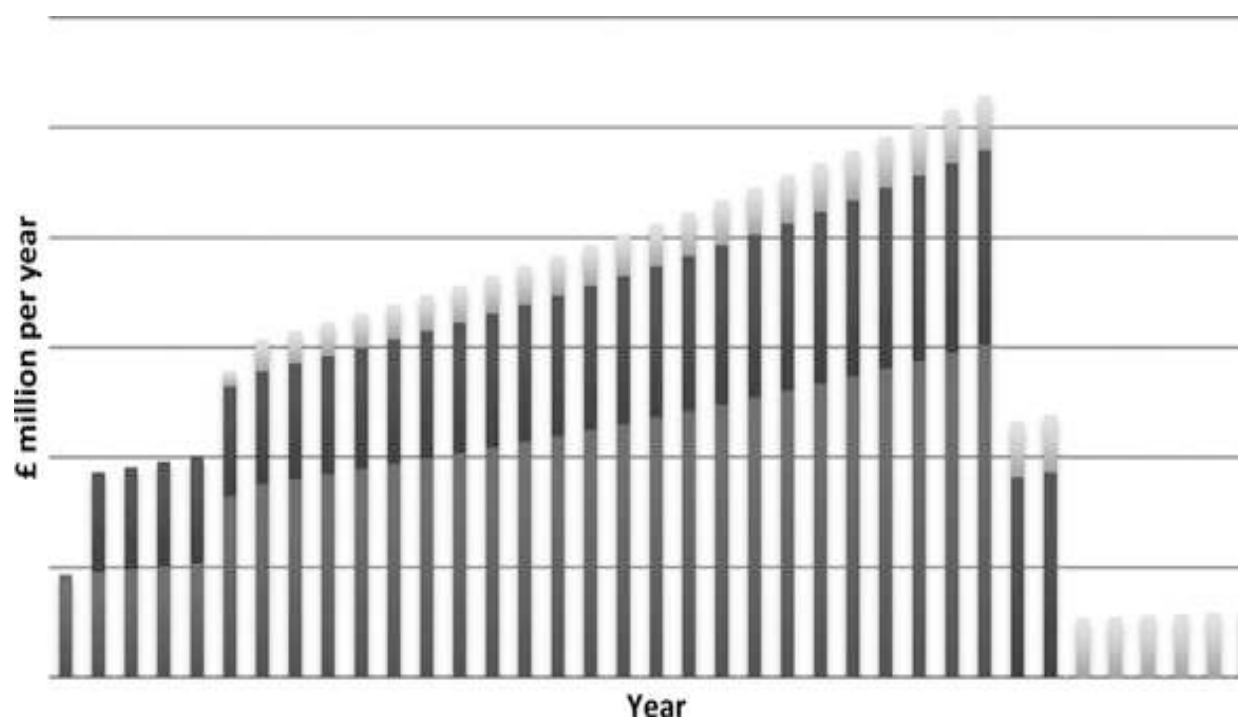


Figure 1. PH spending in three south London hospitals 2003–2039. *Data Source:* HM Treasury, 2010.

The implications of this already being felt as the commercial needs of PFI hospitals have started to skew local priorities. For instance, across the NHS hospital managers have become adept at using outpatient appointments for minor operations, so that patients no longer have to stay in hospital for an extended period of time. This, of course, represents a significant saving and has a much wider community benefit. However, as a recent internal report noted (South East London, 2008), in the case of South East London these ‘unplanned reductions in acute activity’ had unexpectedly limited the income of local PFI hospitals that need to treat a certain amount of patients in order to receive government money. The report noted that the only ways in which these hospitals will be able to meet their expanding PFI payments will be through reductions in patient care as other options are severely curtailed by the contracts that have been signed. As it notes,

‘in the event of a reduction in acute activity and income...[PFI hospitals] cannot sell any surplus estate (because it does not own it), nor may it lease part of the site to a third party user without the consent of the majority of bondholders. Achieving such consent would be difficult to achieve and costly...[and] it is probably that bondholders would have to be compensated to gain agreement’ (pp. 3–4).

Thus, the ability of local hospital managers, local politicians, and communities to influence health care provision in the area is now structurally dependent on the decisions of external private sector ‘bondholders’. Even though the hospitals were in the public sector before the PFI contracts were signed, the private companies now ‘own them for the terms of the leases, and can prevent any changes of use’ (p. 4), whatever patient needs or community views. Non-PFI local hospitals have, therefore, had to bear the majority of cuts as they are ‘the sites where there is greatest scope to reduce fixed costs...[and] where surplus estate can be sold or leased’ (p. 7). In September 2010, it was announced that Accident and Emergency and Maternity Departments in one of the area’s non-PFI hospital would have be closed. Such actions are an inevitable consequence of the PFI and as Hawkes (2007) predicted in 2007, drawing on South East London as an example, ‘hospitals that are cheaper to run will face cuts, while patients will be crammed into more expensive PFI hospitals in an attempt to make them profitable’ (p. 1).

Not only does the PFI limit the options for healthcare provision but it also muddies the waters of accountability by creating a hyper-plurality in the ownership of public assets. [Table 1](#) lists the organizations that have been involved in the PFI projects for the three hospitals. It demonstrates the multi-national nature of project financing and the extent to which financial and political power has been transferred from local communities to non-local actors. Bondholders include Innisfree Ltd., who are one of the biggest investment groups in PFI projects in the UK and specialize in providing new investment channels for global hedge funds. It is the single largest investor in NHS hospitals, with involvement in 28 PFI contracts. It has also invested in similar schemes in Canada and Sweden. Other, city-based financial organizations such as Barclays Private Equity and Lloyd-TSB have also seen such investments as a golden opportunity to ensure a steady flow of low-risk, long-term profits. German, Dutch, French, and Japanese investment

Table 1 Stakeholders involved in PFI projects for Greenwich, Bromley, and Lewisham Hospitals

Stakeholder types	Greenwich (Queen Elizabeth Hospital)	Bromley (Princess Royal University Hospital)	Lewisham (University Hospital Redevelopment)
<i>Public Sector Authority Advisors</i>	• Herbert Smith Ltd - Legal	• Herbert Smith Ltd. - Legal	• Ernst & Young - Financial
• KPMG - Financial	• Arthur Andersen - Financial	• Cundall Johnston - Technical	
	• Charterhouse - Financial	• Cyril Sweett	
	• Cyril Sweett	• Bevan Brittan - Legal	
	• AYH - Technical	• Llwewlyn-Davies Architects	
	• Richard Ellis		
<i>Private Sector Contractor</i>	• Meridian Hospital Company Pic	• United Healthcare (Farnborough Hospital) Ltd	• Ravensbourne Health Services Ltd
<i>Shareholders/Members/Partners</i>	• Innisfree (50%)	• Barclays Private Equity (42.55%)	• Mowlem (50%)
• Kvaerner (50%)	• Innisfree (42.55%)	• Barclays European Infrastructure (50%)	

Stakeholder types	Greenwich (Queen Elizabeth Hospital)	Bromley (Princess Royal University Hospital)	Lewisham (University Hospital Redevelopment)
	• Taylor Woodrow Construction (14.9%)		
<i>Private Sector Contractors</i>	• Skanska - Design & Build	• Taylor Woodrow - Design & Build	• Mowlem - Design & Build
• ISS Mediclean Ltd - Soft FM	• ISS Mediclean Ltd.	• Sovereign Hospital Services - HardFM	
• Skanska Rashleigh Weatherfoil Facilities Services - Hard FM	• Taylor Woodrow - Hard FM	• Healthcare Environments	
• George Trew Dunn - Architect	• Scottish Hydro-Electric pic	• RTKL Associates	
	• Healthsource Ltd.		
	• Barratt Homes		
	• Healthcare Environments		
	• Coda Architects		
<i>Private Sector Advisor(s)</i>	N/A	• Desdner Kleinwort	• Espirito Santo Investments-Financial

Stakeholder types	Greenwich (Queen Elizabeth Hospital)	Bromley (Princess Royal University Hospital)	Lewisham (University Hospital Redevelopment)
		Benson-Financial	
• DLA Piper - Legal	• Linklaters - Legal		
• The Denis Wilson Partnership Ltd.	• Aon - Insurance		
• Waterman Partnership - Technical	• Gleeds		
• Zisman Bowyer & Partners- Technical	• Troupe Bywaters & Anders		
• James Nisbet & Partners- Technical	• Healthcare Environments		
	• Jacobs Gibb - Technical		
<i>Principal Bank/Bond Arranger</i>	• Barclays Capital Pic.	• Dresdner Kleinwort Benson	• Dexia Public Finance Bank
	• ABN AMRO	• Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation	
	• Paribas		
	• Lloyds-TSB		

Source: Adapted from information available at www.partnershipsUK.org.uk

banks have taken on the role of principal bond arrangers as new opportunities emerge. The net result in that lines of responsibility have become so confused and blurred that any notion of accountability and political control has been deliberately removed and restricted.⁵ Companies such as Innisfree have come

to wield enormous power over health services, yet remain relatively anonymous and insulated from criticism and public scrutiny.

Public Transport and the New Contractualism

A similar situation is to be found in the organization and provision of public transport. Its availability and accessibility plays a key role in community cohesion, particularly in poorer neighbourhoods where other transport options are limited. Its increased use is also an important part of any sustainability agenda and its role therefore goes beyond that of a simple service of carrying passengers. Public transport has been subject to some of the most significant and wide-ranging privatization programmes to be found in any sector of the welfare state. The current arrangements work through centrally negotiated franchises in which private operators compete to obtain the contracts to run services for a specified period of time. There are, for instance, 16 Rail Franchises in England, mainly operated on a regional basis, alongside a complex mix of bus franchises operated at a variety of scales. Once an operator possesses a Franchise Agreement, then the ability of community groups or politicians to influence levels of service provision is severely restricted, particularly as multinational organizations have come to dominate franchises, with decisions over fares, services, and time-tables becoming 'commercial' decisions focused on expanding profitability. This plurality of provision leads to a lack of coordination between providers and new forms of transport poverty (see Docherty & Shaw, 2011). Despite this, the Coalition has been unwilling to consider the introduction of regional or metropolitan strategic planning bodies for transport, or for any form of publicly funded infrastructure provision. Its ideological aversion to planning beyond localities (see Pickles, 2010b) seems particularly contradictory in relation to transport planning which is designed to connect up communities and localities across boundaries.

Again, the example of South East London and its railways exemplifies many of these broader tensions. Local train services are provided by Go-Via Ltd., a subsidiary company of the UK-based trans-national Go-Ahead transport group. Go-via has a multi-national ownership structure, with French firm Keolis (itself partly-owned by the French rail operator SNCF) having a 35% stake. The company operates under the name Southeastern Ltd. and it runs a

monopoly service. Its Franchise Agreement, signed in 2006, is 303 pages long and contains a remarkable amount of legal-technical detail and complexity, making it extremely difficult for communities and even policy-makers to establish how and why service decisions are made (see Department for Transport, 2006). Fares are determined through a process of negotiation between central government and the rail company, involving a further loss of local accountability and inclusion in decision-making processes. The convoluted contract ‘ensures that Commuter Fares and Protected Fares are created in accordance with the Ticketing and Settlement Agreement and appropriate restrictions are place on the Franchisee’s ability to Create Fares’ (p. 113).

On closer inspection, the contract sets out specific boundaries of state and community action. For example, any attempt by a future government to impose additional costs on the rail company has to ‘ensure that the Franchisee is placed in the financial position that it would have been if such a requirement had not been imposed’ (p. 133). In other words, if a policy change reduces the income stream of the private operator, the latter must be compensated by taxpayers. Trains are run according to service delivery ‘benchmarks’ and fare pricing structures, that are set through complex mathematical algorithms and calculations such as those exemplified in [Figure 2](#). Power is thus transferred to auditors, statisticians, and other experts with fares and services being decided on economic grounds rather than considerations of social need or environmental sustainability. The contract seeks to cover as many foreseeable future risks to the train company’s income stream as possible. For example, electricity price increases (p. 172) will be compensated for, or any factors that ‘result in a reduction in the Franchisee’s revenue’ (p. 172), all in the name of ‘reasonable incentivization’ for private investors. Remarkably, there is even provision in the Agreement for the government to ‘at any time decide to reimburse or ameliorate net losses of the Franchisee arising from industrial action’ (p. 158), meaning that if there is direct action against the company by its own employees, the shareholders and the company could be protected at the expense of the state. As Go-Ahead explains to shareholders in its *Annual Report 2010*, any risks associated with post-recession revenue declines are mitigated by ‘revenue support’ from the taxpayer. In addition, the company claims that its lobbying power is such that it can over-ride any ‘adverse’ political and regulatory changes. It will ‘closely monitor’ proposals and possesses political expertise on its Board that will enable it to ‘actively participate in industry, trade and government forums and maintain close links with key stakeholders’ (p. 23). Its Board membership includes individuals with

long experience of working in the industry and government, such as Sir Patrick Brown who as Former Permanent Secretary for the Department of Transport (1991–1997) led the government department that was primarily responsible for the privatization of the railways under the Major administration.

Unsurprisingly, given the complexity and expense of these arrangements, fares on Southeastern trains have risen beyond inflation throughout the period of privatization. Peak Fares in 2009 increased by 8%, at the same time as Go-Ahead Group's (2010) operating profits rose to £102 million. As with local hospitals, there have been significant community-based protests over the effects of fare increases on service changes, social cohesion, and the environment. Local MPs of all parties and others have even signed petitions and laid down motions in the House of Commons calling on the company to change its pricing mechanisms (see Reckless, *et al.*, 2010). And yet, Southeastern has no obligation under contract to consider such post-contractual views or the externalities generated by its activities. It runs a monopoly service and has a duty to provide maximum returns for its shareholders. From January 2011, fares are set to rise by a further 7%, and may rise by 30–40% in the next 4 years, following the government's Spending Review that will pass on greater costs for company profitability to local fare payers.

SCHEDULE 8.1

Franchise Payments

1. FRANCHISE PAYMENTS

1.1 The Franchise Payment for any Reporting Period shall be an amount equal to:

$$\text{£FP} = \text{PFP} - \text{RS}_{\text{bA}} - \text{RS}_{\text{bRA}} + \text{RS}_{\text{uA}} + \text{RS}_{\text{uRA}} + \text{POA} + \text{TAA} + \text{SCA} - \text{TAA} + \text{VTA} + \text{VSA} - \text{NI}$$

where:

£FP means the Franchise Payment for that Reporting Period;

$$\text{PFP} \text{ means } \left(\frac{\text{RPD}}{\text{FYD}} \times \text{AFP} \right)$$

where:

RPD means the number of days in that Reporting Period;

FYD is equal to 365 or, if February 29 occurs during the Franchisee Year in which that Reporting Period falls, 366; and

AFP means the Annual Franchise Payment for the Franchisee Year in which that Reporting Period occurs, as determined in accordance with Schedule 8.2 (*Annual Franchise Payments*);

POA means the amount of any Priced Option Adjustment being payable for any part, or the whole, of such Reporting Period on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

RS_{bA} means the amount of any Revenue Share Adjustment to be made on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

RS_{bRA} means the amount of any Revenue Share Reconciliation Amount to be paid on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

RS_{uA} means the amount of any Revenue Support Adjustment to be made on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

RS_{uRA} means the amount of any Revenue Support Reconciliation Amount to be paid on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

SCA means any Station Charge Adjustment to be made on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

TAA means any Track Access Adjustment to be made on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

VTA means any Variable Track Access Charge Adjustment to be made on that Reporting Period's Payment Date;

Figure 2. The Franchise Payment Agreement for the Integrated Kent Franchise. *Source:* Department for Transport (2006: p. 147).

Similar issues have dogged other public transport privatization schemes in London, such as that of the London Underground. In 2000 it was broken-up and sold so that,

‘the public will own the system, but not control it. The result is a divided management structure that will leave the public managers with no practical means of effectively operating the transport system’ (Kiley, 2001: p. 389).

Wolmar (2007) estimates that approximately £500million of state money was spent in drawing up the detailed contracts alone, with investments on the system delayed for years by subsequent legal wrangling. Once the sale went ahead, the House of Commons Select Committee on Transport (2010: pp. Ev57–58) found that 85% of the money invested came from international financial markers, who perceived the scheme as ‘low risk’. The contracts were arranged so that shareholders were able to extract dividends in ways that avoided paying UK corporation taxes, compounding the losses to the public sector. Moreover, the committee concluded that far from representing an entrepreneurial, risk-taking investment on the part of the private sector, the transfer contracts were set up in such a way that ‘the residual financial risk to shareholders in current circumstances could well be minimal’, even in the event of a failure of the companies to deliver under contract’.⁶

The examples here have been used to provide a snap-shot of some of the implications of privatization for the planning of places both now and in the future. They reflect practices underway in a variety of welfare sectors, such as education and social housing, in which PFIs have come to play a more and more significant role (see Musson, 2008). In the concluding section, the paper looks at potential ways forward in policy terms and argues that any modernization plans for the planning system must engage directly with the legacies of privatization. It also assesses some of the implications of the discussion above for policy and research.

Moving Forward – New Directions for Policy and Research

As this paper has argued, the UK government's plans for the modernization of the planning system are founded on a partial reading and understanding of what constitutes 'the state', how it acts, and what the possibilities are for its mobilization as an agent of democratic freedom. Its critique represents a simple narrative of change that visualizes nothing but a relentless expansion in the power of state bureaucrats to control the lives of individuals and communities. It elides these bureaucracies with a lack of transparency, openness and accountability. It imagines that power has been centralized to government departments and civil servants and that latent forms of local community exist that have been systematically marginalized. However, as the discussion above has highlighted, one of the problems with this simple narrative is that its characterizations of the state are clichéd and relatively crude. There is a noticeable absence of theoretical and empirical engagement with broader questions over how state bureaucracies *could* act if they were reformed and made more accountable through existing and/or reformed representative democratic structures.

This dismissive characterization of the state as a 'barrier' to action has thus far limited the extent of creative thinking about what planning is and what it could become. One of the paradoxes of localism, for example, is that in some instances the existence of stronger state bureaucracies can *enhance* the democratic accountability of welfare service management to local user communities, rather than detract from it. As Du Gay (2002) argues, bureaucracies can, if made accountable and responsive, act as important guarantors of individual and collective freedoms in ways that echo some of the rhetoric of the localism agenda. Similar points were made in the 1980s by Gamble (1988) who drew attention to some of the core contradictions inherent in the neo-liberal thinking of the Thatcher regime. He argued that the freeing up of markets could only function *if* selected state institutions were given new powers and responsibilities to control powerful elites and tackle the power of collective labour. Businesses, it was argued, only flourish in a context of 'strong' monetarist macro-economic policy, delivered by powerful regulatory agencies.

The same principles could also apply to localism reforms. Given the structural constraints on community action highlighted above, local control over welfare services may, in fact, be propagated by the creation of more powerful state institutions if allied to new modes of responsiveness and representative political authority. If local authorities and/or other government agencies were given new powers to break open and systematically dismantle some of the contractual straight-jackets associated with privatization, then

citizens and communities may be able to expand their influence over the delivery of welfare services in ways that better reflect local needs and priorities. Services could become more accountable and responsive to elected representatives and changing demands, without having to shift priorities to commercial needs and inflexible contractual obligations. Thus rather than seeing state bureaucracies as an obstacle to community empowerment, as the Coalition does, in some instances, their strengthening may therefore be a prerequisite for a broader process of democratization, particularly if bureaucracies are mobilized to tackle powerful vested interests and elites. Far from crushing localism, stronger state institutions could in fact enable citizen and community action to flourish. Moreover, a selective and carefully judged re-empowerment of state bureaucracies might also add new impetus to representative political processes, with politicians able to articulate alternative ways of working and empowerment to carry out their political projects. It may also provide new spaces for greater policy flexibility both now and in the future as demands on welfare services and the planning of places change. How, for example, can long-term contracts cater for the needs of an increasingly elderly population and/or the changes brought about by the mobility of workers and investors?

One key ingredient of any set of reforms will be to think through the full implications of privatization for the planning system. The political discussion has thus far focused on how policy can ‘free up’ the private sector to create jobs and boost profitability in the ‘national interest’ (see Cameron, 2010b). There is little or no interest in tackling the structural power that the private sector now possesses through privatization, or how their roles and responsibilities could and should be regulated by state institutions. If localism is to mean anything, then as this paper has shown, it needs to directly engage with the powers embedded in private sector contractualism. The current lack of transparency and the financial limitations associated with privatization run counter to the aspirations of the reform agenda in which planning is to become ‘rooted in civic engagement and collaborative democracy as the means of reconciling economic development with quality of life’ (Conservative Party, 2010: p. 1). The broader rationality for a planning system that integrates and co-ordinates the provision of infrastructure and welfare services across national and regional spaces is undermined in a context where contracts shield private interests from changing public values and sensitivities.

Given the importance of the PFI and new contractualism in shaping community lives, it is perhaps surprising that Geographers, Planners, and others have not looked more closely at this issue and its impacts on local

communities (for an exception see Musson, 2008). This may be a reflection of the nature of PFI agreements, in that they are not seen to be politically controversial and have therefore not attracted a huge amount of attention from community groups, government, or politicians. It may also reflect the closed and bureaucratic nature of the PFI process and the extent to which this precludes in-depth academic research on the grounds of contractual and commercial confidentiality.⁷ However, as this paper has argued researchers urgently need to explore existing structures of political power and undertake in-depth empirical work on where sources of power lie and how they are exercised. There is now a pressing need to explore the ways in which institutional practices, as well as political discourses, are mobilized to enrich and empower specific groups, whilst impoverishing and disempowering others.

In addition, the paper has also highlighted the importance of networks and flows of money and the growing and powerful links between private investment funds and public infrastructure. For example, the PFI was in part set up to enable pension funds and others to find new avenues through which to generate profits that are then used to fund payments to investors. An irony of the PFIs in the NHS is that many of the same individuals and communities who will disproportionately suffer from the negative consequences of declining levels of local health care provision also stand to gain the most from the ‘successful’ investments made by their pension funds. The PFI thus reflects and reproduces some of the growing *interdependencies* and entanglements that have been generated by the privatization of welfare provision. Unpicking how such structures work and where a broader discussion of community empowerment, Open Source Planning might fit in to such dynamics is a significant but vital task.

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Notes

1. The Coalition government was formed after the General Election of May 2010. It is a formal coalition between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties and its core policy proposals are summarised in a *Coalition Agreement* (Cabinet Office, 2010). Under a *Localism Bill* and set of proposals to create an *Open Source Planning System* the Coalition has outlined a set of proposals to radically change the planning system, as discussed elsewhere in this Special Issue.
2. Under Treasury rules PFI liabilities do not officially count as public borrowing. Gordon Brown, first as Chancellor of the Exchequer, then as Prime Minister, staked his reputation for fiscal management on limiting public borrowing. The PFI, therefore, served an important political function in helping the Labour government to both deliver new infrastructure, whilst limiting the official public sector debt.
3. Edwards (2009) notes that in the case of a PFI contract for hospitals in Norwich taxpayers would have to find over £300 million to buy out the contract from private investors. Remarkably this would actually save money in the longer term by cutting saving £217m in repayments.
4. In July 2010 it published a radical White Paper, *Equity and Excellence: Liberating the NHS* (HMSO, 2010), and its proposals provide an insight into the government's broader vision for how a so-called Big Society agenda might function. As Price and Pollock (2010) note, it proposes to introduce a full health care market that will, in effect, lead to the break-up of the national risk-pool system in which all citizens are currently entitled to health care provision wherever they live and whatever their health concerns. This founding principle of the NHS will, the authors contend, be undermined by a forced localism in which individual doctors will be given the responsibility to manage their own budgets and 'for deciding how best to use these resources to meet the healthcare needs of the patients for whom they are responsible' (p. 6). However, these proposals have generated much debate and controversy and as of summer 2011 they were still up for negotiation.
5. In addition to service cuts, the quality of the new hospitals is also poor, with one being labelled as one of the dirtiest hospitals in Britain (see BBC, 2008). Such a situation is not uncommon as across the NHS hospitals have been built under PFI projects that are much smaller than the ones they replaced in order to make the PFI look like better value for money (see Edwards, 2009; Pollock, 2006 for a thorough discussion).
6. Two companies were established to run the infrastructure contracts – Metronet and Tube Lines. In both instances, the contracts collapsed with Metronet folding in July 2007 and Tube Lines reneging on its contract in 2010. Metronet's parent companies consisted of a consortium of multi-national companies, including Atkins, Balfour Beatty, Bombardier, EDF, and Thames Water. The House of Commons Transport Committee (2008) reported that 60% of the sub-contracts awarded by Metronet for capital projects were made to its parent companies, thus creating tied supply chains through investors made a double benefit. Remarkably even though it was Metronet that reneged on the public-private contract, it was the public sector bodies that picked up the majority of the costs, with some estimates that the total bill for public authorities was over £500 million.
7. It is interesting to note that Tony Blair's (2010b) memoirs are critical of the Freedom of Information legislation introduced by his government on the grounds that the decision-making processes surrounding some decisions of government should be kept confidential to improve the quality of legislation.

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Towards Post-political Consensus in Urban Policy? Localism and the Emerging Agenda for Regeneration Under the Cameron Government

IAIN DEAS

Iain Deas, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester.

Abstract

The paper explores recent experience of urban policy in England and provides an assessment of its evolution and future prospects under the Cameron government. It explores the contention that urban policy has undergone a fundamental repositioning in which neo-liberal ideas, linked to the emerging localism agenda, have begun to exert a profound shift in the role of the state in formulating and delivering policy. The paper argues that neo-liberal thinking increasingly permeates contemporary policy, but that this exists alongside a residual (but diminishing) emphasis on socio-spatial dimensions of equity. This, the paper concludes, reflects the emergence of a degree of post-political consensus around the role for urban policy and the mechanisms for its delivery.

Introduction

Urban regeneration in England has long been an area of public policy-making characterized by experimentation, innovation and uncertainty, as successive governments have searched for more efficacious ways of intervening in the social and economic fortunes of neighbourhoods and cities. The Cameron Conservative-led coalition government, elected in 2010, has continued this process, with a sequence of area-based initiatives developed in its first two years. Wedded to a familiar process of policy and institutional rationalization and proliferation has been a more radical attempt to reshape the relationship between government and citizens, and national and local branches of the state. This has been driven in part by a desire to downsize the state but also by a related wish to begin a potentially more fundamental programme for the reform of the governance of local areas, in which civil society actors begin increasingly to inherit public policy-making and service delivery functions in the past exercised largely by government or (more recently) an array of quasi-public institutions.

On the basis of *ex-post* reflection on the experience of urban policy in England under the Blair and Brown Labour governments from 1997 to 2010, the paper provides an *ex-ante* assessment of the nature of emerging policy and explores its implications in light of wider efforts to theorize ongoing reforms to public policy and governance. The paper explores the contention that the shape and form of emerging policy for urban regeneration is indicative of what might come to be viewed as a fundamental transformation, in which neo-liberal ideas are fused with a localist desire to widen the range of actors involved in formulating and delivering policy. The paper concludes that the thrust of emerging policy for urban regeneration offers qualified support for the notion that neo-liberal thinking is infusing to an ever greater degree contemporary policy, but that this continues a long-term trend in the evolution of policy. It argues, moreover, that this ongoing process of neo-liberalization exists in a context in which a residual emphasis on social and redistributive aspects of policy continues but in greatly diminished form. At this still early stage, incipient urban policy under the Cameron administration in some (but not all) respects therefore exhibits marked elements of continuity with its predecessors. This, it is argued, reflects the emergence of a degree of post-political consensus around the role for urban policy and the mechanisms through which it should be delivered.

The Emerging Agenda for Localist Regeneration Policy in England

The context for the election of the Cameron government was one in which the emphasis was on how best to scale-back the state and develop capacity across civil society. This was in part a pragmatic response to what was viewed as an escalating government budget deficit, and a growing public indebtedness that was said to threaten the confidence of financial markets and potentially undermine macroeconomic stability. But it also had ideological roots. Alongside the longstanding, atavistic desire to shrink the state and reassert the primacy of markets, the Conservatives (and, from a different ideological perspective, their centrist Liberal Democrat counterparts in government) sought also to alter the balance between state and citizen, replacing ‘big government’ with ‘big society’. This was a notion that sought to challenge the pervasiveness of the state in social life, whilst rejecting the alternative of an atomized individualism and asserting instead the desirability of collective forms of voluntary social organization—Burkean ‘little platoons’—via a range of ‘intermediate institutions between the individual and the state’ (Norman, 2011) and an enriched and vibrant civic culture more generally (Blond, 2010). It was a notion which contended that a ‘control shift’ was required to give a range of non-state actors greater autonomy to deliver the kinds of service that in the past had tended fully or largely to be the responsibility of the state, either as direct provider or, as had become increasingly common, detached commissioner or regulator (Conservative Party, 2009). This was an agenda which emphasized that ‘centralization and top-down control have proved a failure...[[it is our ambition to distribute power and opportunity to people rather than hoarding authority within government’ (Cabinet Office, 2010, p. 7).

As well as encouraging service management and delivery responsibility to be transferred from the state to community groups, this also implied a desire to repeal the elaborate system of performance management that had evolved under the previous administration, compelling service providers to work towards centrally prescribed targets that were said by the Conservatives and their allies to have distorted priorities, constrained flexibility, and undermined efficacy. This was a system previously likened,

by Bevan and Hood (2006, p. 517), to a pseudo-Soviet regime of ‘targets and terror’, encouraging conformity and uniformity at the expense of innovation and diversity. As a result, government set out to dismantle the architecture of performance management, abolishing the Comprehensive Area Assessment system operated by the Audit Commission to measure and grade local authority service delivery and jettisoning the system of Local Area Agreements devised by the previous administration to require local authorities and their partners to commit to measurable service outputs and outcomes. As an alternative to the supposedly restrictive, box-ticking culture that had pervaded local government under the previous Labour administrations, government professed to be relaxed about the precise arrangements for policy-making and delivery that local areas would adopt and about the potential for increased asymmetry.

Crucially, this agenda of retrenching the state and fostering increased activism amongst a wider array of societal actors had a spatial dimension, in the sense that there was an implied devolution of power and responsibility from both central and local government, on the grounds that ‘centralization has failed’ (CLG, 2010, p. 4). This decentralization, *inter alia*, was to involve neighbourhood groups, defined in the Localism Act as including parish councils and any ‘organisation or body which is, or is capable of being, designated [by the local authority] as a neighbourhood forum’ (HM Government, 2011a, p. 353). This continuing emphasis on neighbourhood-based subdivisions of local government in some senses followed on from the previous government’s interest in ‘new localism’, and its efforts to promote what Bache and Catney (2008, p. 425) call an ‘embryonic associationalism’, linked to the short-lived ‘double devolution’ agenda, in which ‘self-governing associations... would be the primary means of organizing social and economic activity and... would free governments from the encumbrance of an over-extended and centralized public-service state’ (see also, for example, Stoker, 2005). However, the localism agenda differed in some important respects. The principal one was that unevenness in the form and extent of governance and policy across neighbourhoods began to be viewed not just as permissible, but desirable. This was a more radical, *laissez faire* reinterpretation of the principle of subsidiarity, accepting not only that inter-neighbourhood disparities in governance and policy are inevitable, but that diversity breeds creativity, innovation, and individual and community self-reliance. In this sense, the localism agenda

was an attempt to release what proponents claimed was the latent ‘creative chaos’ that existed within local neighbourhoods—a chaos that was contrasted with the ordered, formal and unimaginative approaches to planning and regeneration said to characterize past efforts by local and central government (Boles, 2010). The localism agenda, in this respect, marked a rejection of the rational, evidence-based approach—‘what matter is what works’, in Tony Blair’s words (Driver & Martell, 2000, p. 151)—central to the politics of the previous Labour administration.

The localism agenda developed rapidly in the first months of the new administration, with a Localism Bill published in December 2010 and enacted 11 months later. The Act promotes the devolution of power to local community groups in key areas. It includes provisions for community groups to assume service delivery from local authorities and to purchase public assets. It also seeks to enhance community empowerment (for example, via local referenda). Some parish councils are to be given a general power of competence, in an attempt to increase their discretion and to encourage them to develop a broader remit. The reinvigoration of these sometimes moribund local groups is to be part of a wider attempt to enhance political capacity amongst local areas. So too, for larger cities, is provision for the introduction of directly elected mayors. In combination, these measures were intended to represent an attempt, in the words of the local government minister, to ‘[change] the default from local government existing to do the things that the Government tell it to do, to the other way around—that local government can do anything unless the Government tell it not to’ (Greg Clark, quoted in Public Bill Committee, 2011, column 24).

The localism agenda offered the promise, rhetorically at least, of a potentially far-reaching shift in the way in which sub-national governance and policy were to be organized. It expressed an underlying desire to devolve power and responsibility for a number of areas of policy-making from local government, to a variety of local institutions and actors expressed somewhat vaguely in terms of a series of Abstract nouns: neighbourhoods, communities, and local people. The principal means for achieving this devolution, in the main, lay not with extra resources or major legislative reform (the Localism Act notwithstanding), but with reductions in public expenditure, including local government finance settlement allocations from the centre to local authorities, as well as specific national policy initiatives. This left urban regeneration especially vulnerable. First,

resultant reductions in expenditure on mainstream services limited the scope for integrative synergies with targeted regeneration policy—something that had long been a goal of central government. Second, the sometimes experimental, impermanent nature of much of regeneration policy, and its limited political profile and electoral significance, rendered it an easy area to cut—explaining its prominence in a first wave of cuts announced in 2010 (Headlam, 2010). Nevertheless, the idea here was that regeneration activity ought not to diminish in quality or quantity, in part because cuts could be absorbed by local authorities able to identify the kinds of ‘efficiency gain’ that have long eluded public bureaucracies, but also because a range of societal actors would fill the void left by state retrenchment and develop alternative forms of bottom-up, community-initiated regeneration. To help in that process, government introduced in 2011 a Big Society Vanguard initiative, in which four local authorities were given modest seedcorn funding (of about £100,000 each) to help stimulate new community-led projects. However, reflecting deep disquiet about the scale of public expenditure cuts and a consequently diluted ability to support localist endeavours, one of the four—Liverpool City Council—subsequently withdrew from the initiative, exemplifying the wider difficulties in implementing the big society.

These and other innovations accompanying the localism agenda have potentially significant implications for the shape of regeneration policy in England. Driven by the immediate concern to reduce public expenditure and the long-term goal of recalibrating the relationship between state and civil society, emerging national policy for local regeneration differed in some respects from that pursued by the previous government. Gone was the ambitious, integrative framework for policy that had previously existed in the shape of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (or before it, the cross-programme Action for Cities initiative in place from 1989 to 1997). Also off the agenda was the notion that the targeting of regeneration resources ought to be undertaken systematically and underpinned by a formal evidence base of the kind developed through the sequence of deprivation indices commissioned by previous governments. Instead, the Localism Act implied that regeneration activity would emerge in a more elemental way, as local actors mobilized to develop interventions appropriate to the circumstances of their areas, drawing selectively upon ‘evidence’ (in the form of the 2011 iteration of the Index of Multiple

Deprivation, for instance) where it was deemed appropriate. In the spirit of localist devolution, leadership, organizational structures, and resources would vary between places, reflecting the differential ability of local areas in terms of institutional capacity, social capital and fiscal integrity. Again, such unevenness was seen not only as inevitable but also beneficial in compelling local actors, in the absence of guaranteed funding from the centre, to seek imaginative policy solutions which would draw resources from suitably broad-based cross-sectoral groups of local actor.

Under this emerging national approach to regeneration, while the role of the state in developing, delivering and regulating regeneration policy was to be repositioned, it would be overly simplistic to view this simply as a withdrawal from regeneration policy (see, for example, Pugalis, 2011). From 2010, the government announced a series of initiatives intended in part to facilitate the kind of organic regeneration activity envisaged as part of the localism agenda—but which could also be interpreted along quite different lines, as subsequent sections of the paper go on to explain.

Towards a Localist Urban Regeneration Policy?

The first policy innovation came with the launch of a series of *Local Enterprise Partnerships*, launched in response to the 2010 Conservative manifesto commitment to give ‘councils and businesses the power to form their own business-led local enterprise partnerships instead of RDAs’ (Conservative Party, 2010, p. 24). These were to be multi-sector partnerships, with business to the fore. They were to be locally initiated, tailored to local circumstances, and standing in contrast to the rigidity and inflexibility of top-down Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). Their delimitation was to be informed by the particularities of local needs, offering the opportunity to ‘rewrite the economic geography of the country—unconstrained by... top-down prescription’ (BIS, 2010).

By early 2012, 39 LEPs had been approved by central government. Their geography varied, from those based conservatively on existing political and institutional spaces such as local authorities or city-regions (as in Greater Manchester and Leeds), to some that transcended established boundaries and related more closely to functional economic areas (Valler & Carpenter,

2011). There were also attempts to develop cross-LEP working to try to offset the abolition of formal structures at the regional level (as in the case of three LEP proposals covering part of the former Yorkshire RDA). Progress in establishing LEPs tended to be slowest in the South East England, but other areas struggled to agree the shape and format of their agency (Hayman, 2010).

Initial progress in recruiting shadow board members and gaining government assent for policy prospectuses was said by one review to be highly uneven (Bolton & Coupar, 2011). The substance of the early strategies developed by the LEPs also varied, with some focusing predominantly on skills, others on infrastructure, and many on developing more holistic proposals for the development of their local economies. Such variation notwithstanding, binding the LEPs is their shared focus on economic growth, and particularly bolstering private sector job creation: the agenda was to be ‘all about growth, not about grants’ (Pickles, 2011). This was viewed as an especial priority for areas reliant on the public sector and therefore most susceptible to government expenditure cuts.

The resurrection of the Enterprise Zone (EZ) model was to provide a further method of stimulating growth within the LEPs. The 2011 Budget saw the announcement that LEPs would each be entitled to seek designation of one of 21 planned EZs, within which firms would be subsidized via a mix of time-limited exemption from local property taxes, increased tax allowances to encourage capital investment, and the inception of a more permissive, pro-growth development control regime. Linked to the latter were more radical suggestions that LEPs, despite their lack of any formal or direct local electoral mandate, might in future also have a role in developing strategic planning provisions, as government explored options for a more streamlined, pro-business alternative to the labyrinthine multi-level system created by the previous administration in 2004.

It is tempting, then, to interpret the LEPs programme as a new innovation, which sits neatly alongside the government’s localist rhetoric. However, it would be wrong to understate the degree to which the LEPs continue a long-established lineage of spatially based policy intervention. Although nominally allowing for an enhanced degree of discretion to enable local actors to develop relevant strategies, the reality is that the centre continues to exercise oversight on LEP proposals. Public criticism of LEP proposals from government is difficult to reconcile with the discourse

of localism and autonomy. Business Secretary Vince Cable, for example, lamented the proliferation of small-scale, fragmented LEPs (Financial Times, 2010a). In this sense, LEPs, reliant on central government approval, are little different to the preceding procession of area-based initiatives dependent on Whitehall sanction. And after their establishment, LEPs continue to be reliant on the centre for funding, through allocations of Regional Growth Fund (RGF) and Growing Places Fund, the award of modest Capacity Fund monies to help with the development of action plans, and reimbursement of tax revenues foregone as a result of EZ status.

The composition of LEP boards also suggests a degree of continuity and conservatism. Initial indications suggested private sector involvement was restricted largely to symbolic inclusion, with policy proposals continuing to be driven by local state actors in and around local government (SQW, 2010). Local authority representatives remained prominent on LEP boards, but—contrary to big society rhetoric—only 4% of non-local authority directors came from the voluntary sector (Hayman, 2011). Some LEPs, like Lancashire's had at their outset representation from the area's pre-existing RDA. The conservatism of the LEP boards' composition led some to lament the creation of 'council-dominated talking shops' (Richard Lambert, CBI, quoted in Pickard, 2010a). Others bemoaned the apparently haphazard composition of LEP boards, and the 'seemingly random hybrids of council members and business people ...[with]...*ad hoc* structures with different sizes and shapes across the country' (Pickard, 2010b).

Continuity in policy is also evident in some respects in relation to a second policy, the *Regional Growth Fund*. Announced in the 2010 Budget and then extended in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement in 2011, RGF was to provide some £2.4b over four years for projects that offer significant potential for economic growth and private sector job creation. The focus was said in the Local Growth White Paper again to be on areas deemed most reliant on public sector employment (HM Government, 2010, p. 32). Echoing the competitively allocated challenge fund schemes of the 1990s, RGF resources were to be distributed on a discretionary basis, initially via two bidding rounds in 2011, with at least two further competitions to be held from 2012. Proposals were sought from private organizations and public-private partnerships, with LEPs to the fore.

Initial debate about RGF centred on the apparent short-termism of the programme, and the desire to focus funding on projects that would generate

immediate benefits in terms of employment growth: ‘a short-term strategy to create private sector jobs in areas hit by cut backs in the public sector... We aren’t an RDA’, in the words of the bidding panel’s deputy chair (Bounds & Tighe, 2011). Long-term funding, for the kinds of supply-side initiatives undertaken by RDAs around infrastructure development or training programmes, was said to have received less attention, sacrificed in favour of ‘ribbon-cutting’ projects. In this respect, RGF simply continued a long history of spatially targeted regeneration policies employed in a piecemeal, compensatory way, to offset the spatial consequences of structural economic decline by focusing on obvious areas of new growth and generating ‘quick wins’.

In this sense, as with LEPs, it is difficult to argue that RGF adheres to the principles of localism. Guidance for bidders makes clear that a ‘ministerial group will make the final decisions regarding support and prioritization’ (HM Government, 2011c, p. 10)—and even the independent advisory panel had as its chair a Conservative insider in the form of the former Deputy Prime Minister and longstanding regeneration champion, Michael Heseltine. In this respect, localism in urban policy clearly has limits and might more accurately be seen as a form of centrally directed localism—what ministers are said to refer to as ‘guided localism’ (Tomaney *et al.*, 2012, p. 69)—that is at odds with the rhetoric surrounding the Localism Act.

A third series of innovations came in the form of a variety of more modest initiatives, some of them linked to a wider *Local Government Resource Review*, which sought to localize revenue-raising, and augment capacity to develop locally tailored policy by providing alternative streams of funding, independent of central government. One took the form of the centre’s review of whether local authorities ought to be able to retain a fraction of locally raised business rate revenue, hitherto pooled nationally and redistributed to reflect variable local service needs and differential ability to fund them from local tax bases (CLG, 2011a, 2011b). The possibility that the longstanding commitment to fiscal equalization might be discarded could be seen as a by-product of government’s support for increased local autonomy, but from a different perspective as potentially a major diminution in the resources available to local authorities with weaker tax bases (see also, for example, Corry and Stoker, 2002 on this longstanding issue). The Local Government Finance Bill, published in

2011, addressed this ‘Barnsley question’ (as it was termed in reference to the weak tax base of one local authority) by suggesting compensatory tariff payments as a future means of equalization, but also proposed that any future increases in business rate income after 2013 should be retained by localities in order to incentivize a pro-growth attitude towards economic development.

Additional funding streams complemented this by offering the prospect of new resources for regeneration, while again encouraging localities to pursue growth-oriented policy. Tax Increment Financing (TIF), a scheme inherited from the previous government, was envisaged as a means of helping to fund urban development, drawing upon US experience of property-led regeneration (Squires & Lord, 2012). TIF allows local authorities to borrow against future increases in revenues from locally raised business rates generated by new development, as a means of funding major capital and infrastructure investment. Government also announced its intention to establish a New Homes Bonus, ‘nudging’ local authorities to adopt a more permissive approach to house building (or bringing empty homes into use) by allowing an increased fraction of any resultant tax revenues to be retained. As with proposals for the localization of business rates, this again raised the prospect that while local fiscal freedoms might in some instances be enhanced, uneven levels of demand for housing could be reflected in corresponding disparity in local authorities’ ability to generate revenues.

A parallel government commitment in 2011 to broker City Deals, initially in eight of the largest provincial cities, also offered the prospect of increased autonomy for local authorities. These were to be central-local agreements about devolution from Whitehall of responsibility and finance for key policy areas like transport infrastructure and (from the Homes and Communities Agency) housing and regeneration (HM Government, 2011b). Here, too, the spirit of localism was evident in the suggestion that this differed from previous, abortive attempts by the centre to devolve power, in that it would be for localities themselves to identify strategic priority areas: to ‘[make] Government an offer it can’t refuse’ in the words of local government minister Greg Clark (quoted in Jones, 2012).

Across all of these initiatives, it is evident that there is a high level of continuity with past policy. The emphasis continues to be ameliorative rather than preventative. Resources continue to be applied on a modest

scale, their recent diminution even more striking in the context of the deeply ingrained nature of the socio-economic challenges they are intended to confront. And the mechanisms for securing urban change also demonstrate a degree of continuity. Cross-sectoral partnership working is seen as incontestably the best basis on which to develop policy. A desire to promote flexible institutional geometries, sometimes at odds with conventional local authority geographies, has also persisted for a number of years. Indeed, the localism agenda itself, despite its apparent totemic significance for the Cameron government, might be seen as a continuation of the kind of postbureaucratic, public choice-inspired ideas which remained to the fore under the earlier Labour administrations. The desire to soften the boundary between the state, voluntary sector, and business, it could be contended, continues and extends the nascent Blairite agnosticism about the sectoral division of responsibility for service delivery but rejects the latter's insistence on measuring outputs and managing performance.

What is different about the localism agenda, however, is its emphasis on actively dismantling (rather than reforming) parts of the state, eroding its preeminence, and creating more space for non-state actors. Superimposed upon familiar urban policy concerns is the more neoteric desire to begin to develop an urban policy authored not by state actors (with selective and qualified support from the private sector), but which is driven instead by an array of local citizen interests. One can argue that these more recent concerns have developed little beyond the rhetorical and have yet to impact on the substance of regeneration policy in England. As we have seen, new initiatives like LEPs and RGF—diminished funding notwithstanding—do not look dramatically different to their predecessors. Others, like TIF, were inherited from the previous government. However, the localism agenda is potentially significant in respect of urban regeneration in that it increases the scope for greater unevenness in policy. Government's initial, tentative steps to enhance the fiscal self-sufficiency of local authorities, as well as their parallel efforts to empower a range of non-local authority actors and community groups, raise the prospect of introducing a greater degree of asymmetry in the capacity of sub-national institutions (whether neighbourhood, local or city-regional) to fund the kind of regeneration activity that in the past was supported through formal policy initiated within Whitehall. This asymmetry most obviously applies in the context of the contrast between economically buoyant and lagging areas, where any future

ability to retain a portion of locally raised revenues, derived from new housing completions or retained fractions of local business property taxes, could result in variable capacity to develop new forms of policy intervention—which in turn could exacerbate levels of socio-spatial inequality.

Perhaps less obviously, however, even amongst ostensibly poorer local authorities, or across deprived neighbourhoods, there is also potential for increased local autonomy to accentuate disparity. For deprived neighbourhoods, there is evidence of functional heterogeneity in areas with apparently comparable socio-economic profiles, linked to variable levels of social capital which reflect, *inter alia*, differential residential mobility amongst residents (Robson *et al.*, 2008). Cox and Schmuecker (2010) argue that varying levels of social capital amongst deprived areas render some especially vulnerable because of their limited ability to respond to the potential unwinding of formal top-down regeneration policy by developing locally derived alternatives. At the same time, it is possible to argue that variability in local institutional capacity and governance arrangements—about which central government professes to be sanguine—could be viewed in time as creating a competitive market for governance, with multiple and overlapping institutional arrangements being actively encouraged to form and compete, with the fittest flourishing and the weakest withering.

This is not to say, however, even in a context of formal national policy for areabased intervention, that significant inter-area variability in institutional and policy arrangements did not exist. Indeed, local innovation and experimentation have in the past been viewed by some as an intrinsic element of national urban policy, and as a major part of the rationale for area-based intervention in the face of continuing uncertainty about its wider efficacy in transforming the social and economic fortunes of places (Kleinman, 1999; Buck & Gordon, 2004; Leunig & Swaffield, 2007). The advent of competitively allocated discretionary funding in the 1990s reinforced this longstanding element of localism in urban regeneration policy. So too, to an extent, did the emphasis on bottom-up policy development in the subsequent decade, as government sought to promote community involvement by diversifying stakeholder participation, encouraging resident leadership of local policy initiatives, and experimenting with more far-reaching neighbourhood management across a range of public services (see, for example, Lowndes & Sullivan, 2008).

Nevertheless, the overall direction of urban policy under the Cameron administration is one which gives explicit emphasis to the loosening of central direction and encouragement of alternative locally initiated regeneration policies. The concomitant possibility of increased local variability in urban policy in turn raises important questions about the degree to which contemporary regeneration approaches could be said to be underpinned by a unifying consensus, an issue to which the next section of the paper now turns.

Towards a Post-political Urban Regeneration Policy?

Debate about the nature of urban policy in England has been linked in part to what is viewed by some authors as the broader, international demise of spatial Keynesianism and its replacement by a new and different consensus about the extent and form of area-based policy (Martin & Sunley, 1997). Under this reading, the post-Keynesian spatial policy landscape is one characterized by a diminishing emphasis on territorial redistribution and social regeneration, and an associated increase in the importance attached to economic growth, sometimes in already prosperous areas (see, for example, Brenner, 2004). Some have interpreted this as symptomatic of a wider process of neo-liberalization, continuing and extending initial efforts in the 1980s to reconfigure the role of the state by embedding a broadly neo-liberal world-view as an intrinsic part of public policy-making. In turn, this ‘roll out’ thesis—as part of what Brenner *et al.* (2010) term an era of ‘deep(ening) neoliberalization’—has been extended and refined through acknowledgement that the restructuring of governance and policy on the basis of promarket ideas ought to be viewed as a process rather than an outcome, as evidenced by the continued existence of some forms of policy that remain far from neoliberal, but whose evolution has nevertheless been influenced by New Right thinking. It is also evidenced by recognition of the existence of hybrid forms of policy, informed by pro-market thinking but also by a more diverse set of ideas, superimposed on an uneven legacy of inherited policy (Cochrane, 2007). Some authors have sought to capture this

idea in the notion of a variegated neoliberalism, in which different elements of public policy are characterized by differing forms and degrees of neo-liberalization (see, for example, Peck & Theodore, 2007). Despite this complexity and diversity, however, some have argued that urban governance and policy in different international contexts is characterized by an assurance amongst policy-makers about the central tenets of neo-liberal thinking, a fundamental(ist) belief in market-based solutions to social and economic problems, and a conviction that the role of the state ought to be one of minimalist night-watchman, regulating markets in a light-touch way and intervening only in a selective and highly targeted manner in support of capital accumulation (see, for example, Peck, 2010).

The apparent consensus around these core aspects of neo-liberalism, and the relative absence of debate or dispute about them amongst policy elites, has prompted some, following Mouffe (2005), to suggest that the contemporary urban policy environment ought to be considered 'post-political'. This is said to be an environment in which policy actors increasingly view their choices and actions as essentially technical issues, devoid of political significance and determined on the basis of neutral, technocratic deliberation that marginalizes contestation. This reflects a view that forms of urban policy influenced by neo-liberal ideas have become so pervasive that they constitute an orthodoxy that 'forecloses the political' (Swyngedouw, 2009, p. 609)—limiting the scope of policy decisions by emphasizing the importance of lean and efficient 'fast policy', and of 'policy that works' (regardless of ideological content) (Peck, 2011, p. 1). This restricts the room for open debate or meaningful forms of dissent through discursive promotion of neo-liberal strategies to which (in Margaret Thatcher's maxim) 'there is no alternative'. Here, what remains of scrutiny of policy actor choices is based not on formal democratic oversight, but on insular self-regulation and 'deliberation' amongst those involved. This, in turn, narrows the range of policy possibilities that can emerge and limits the scope for departing significantly from the central tenets of neo-liberal thinking. As Paddison (2009, p. 8) notes, 'political debate becomes curtailed as to how collective decisions over specific policy concerns are to be made, rather than whether more fundamentally those concerns should be on the agenda in the first place'. Decision-making is therefore viewed as helpfully depoliticized, cleansed of ideology and free of burdensome responsibilities—consultation, participation, scrutiny—which detract from

the singleminded pursuit of economic growth. This could be said on first inspection to contradict the localist desire for increased citizen participation in policy and governance; but the localism agenda might be viewed more accurately as envisaging a circumscribed form of interaction between state and citizen which limits the possibility for departing from a narrow range of policy prescriptions (an observation also made by Wallace (2010) regarding resident involvement under New Labour).

It is possible to argue, then, that contemporary urban policy reflects this postpolitical consensus. The transition from Labour to Conservative-led government in Britain, as we have seen, was accompanied by only limited changes in the emphases of urban policy, rather than wholesale transformation. While it is undoubtedly the case that policy under the Blair and Brown administrations placed greater emphasis on social and redistributive elements of policy, important aspects of urban policy are characterized by an obvious continuity. Economic development agencies as far back as the first wave of Urban Development Corporations in England in the early 1980s have presented themselves as a business-like antidote to the bureaucratized inertia said to typify local government, and the same kind of thinking was evident in the discourse accompanying the launch of Local Enterprise Partnerships. The idea that what is important, in the words of Allmendinger and Haughton (2009, p. 619), is ‘getting things done’, free of self-indulgent debate about the role and function of urban policy, is one that might be said to be thoroughly implanted in the mindset of policy elites.

The emphasis accorded to securing economic growth is the most obvious element of this continuing consensus about the object of urban policy. It is reflected in a desire to make the economies of provincial cities, and the firms therein, more competitive when measured against their international peers. Developing ‘relevant’ skills, increasing labour market participation, and encouraging the flexibilization of work are key elements of this orthodox view that the object of and rationale for urban policy is to promote place competitiveness (see, for example, Lovering, 2010). Across the raft of policies introduced or extended by the Cameron government—LEPs, RGF, TIF, EZs—there is a consistent desire to promote economic growth. This is in itself unsurprising and unremarkable given the longstanding need, for most of the major industrial cities and regions of the English provinces in particular, to develop new areas of economic activity to offset long-term,

structural and hitherto intractable decline. However, what stands out about these new policy mechanisms is the striking degree to which the kinds of social equity concerns that underlay area-based policy in England from the advent of the Urban Programme in 1968 have been subordinated not just to economic growth, but to its pursuit through the application of a narrow range of largely supply-side policy measures. The commitment to territorial redistribution and equity, while not entirely expunged, is therefore a residual one, replaced by a narrative which instead promotes the need for cities and regions to ‘compete’ in order to ‘catch-up’.

At the same time, infusing contemporary perspectives on regeneration is a view that policy ought to recognize what are seen as the market-driven realities of economic geography. This means accommodating development pressures in already growing areas: in London and its region, but also, as the influential rightwing think-tank the Policy Exchange has argued, in the cores of some of the major provincial cities (Leunig & Swaffield, 2007). Elsewhere, this means responding to the perceived realities of the national space economy by promoting ‘adjustment’ in peripheral areas with scope to capitalize on new economic opportunities, or as the Policy Exchange has also argued, managed contraction where such economic potentials are lacking. And in all of this, the precise nature of policy, it is argued, ought to be determined locally, rather than via a formal national framework or plan (Leunig & Swaffield, 2008).

The growing marginalization of socio-spatial equity objectives, as part of an evolving consensus around competitiveness-oriented urban policy, can be seen to be a long-term trend. The 1980s saw a decisive and well-documented shift in the nature of policy, its governance and its aims, with the role of regeneration defined as one in which concerted and targeted state intervention over a short-period via supply-side interventions could enable development and thereby restore functionality to distressed land and property markets. While this simple formula was softened over time in response to criticism of the failure of property-led approaches to engender social benefits, it is one that has persisted in some form over most or all of the subsequent period.

What is significant about the change of government in 2010 is the further emasculation of any remaining commitment to socio-spatial equity. Spatial policy under Labour was routinely criticized for its fixation with growth, in the form, for example, of an insufficiently redistributive regional policy

(Morgan, 2006), an emphasis on accommodating development pressures in already prosperous cities and regions (Raco, 2007) and an approach to urban housing regeneration which privileged gentrification (Lees, 2008; Lupton & Fuller, 2009). Even allowing for this critique, however, redistribution concerns continued to feature in policy. A Public Service Agreement committed government, albeit somewhat ambiguously, to promote interregional convergence in economic performance, reflected in differential levels of per capita RDA expenditure that diverged over time (although, as Burch *et al.* (2009) argue, other policy choices about spatial development sometimes served to accentuate regional disparity). Likewise, government responded to criticism about its preoccupation with accommodating growth pressures around London by instituting a major programme of Housing Market Renewal in provincial English cities and by experimenting with new forms of city-regional governance. And while gentrification was undoubtedly a part of government's urban renaissance agenda, policy intervention in cities, not least through the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, promoted a rather different form of resident-led social regeneration aimed at improving the socioeconomic fortunes of deprived areas.

By contrast, there is relatively little in regeneration policy under the Cameron government that continues what remained of the commitment to redistribution or tackling poverty under the Blair and Brown administrations. The 'social' element of policy, such as it is, is an ill-defined one, about building capacity, linked to the still evolving localism agenda. Any remaining commitment to ameliorating poverty tends, for the most part, to be vestigial. There are, of course, some exceptions. The Early Intervention Grant (EIG), for example, draws upon the previous administration's pre-emptive and preventative approach by concentrating support for health and educational services for pre-school children in deprived neighbourhoods as a means of improving their life chances and averting the intergenerational perpetuation of poverty. Yet, even the allocation of £2.5b annually for 2010–11 represents a substantial diminution of resources in comparison to the 23 initiatives—notably Sure Start children's centres and the Connexions scheme for improving youth employment outcomes—which preceded EIG (Cavanagh, 2011).

Conversely, the stress on economic development continues, extending an emphasis in policy that dates back at least to the innovations of the Thatcher

governments and arguably to the publication of the White Paper, *Policy for the Inner Cities*, under Labour (DoE, 1977). It is this emphasis on utilizing policy intervention in support of a market-driven process of change in England's economic geography—hastening growth or restructuring in some areas, managing decline in others—that defines the consensus in urban policy that has endured over successive changes of government.

Conclusion

In constructing a synoptic review of a policy area as diverse as regeneration, it is always possible to identify elements of continuity (see, for example, Turok, 1987; Wilks-Heeg, 1996; Shaw & Robinson, 2010). This paper has argued that although a marked degree of continuity is again evident with the election of a new government in Britain in 2010, what is significant is the strengthening of the commitment to a particular form of urban policy. The emerging agenda of the Cameron government in respect of urban regeneration could be said to represent the intensification of a long-term (but as yet incomplete) process in which neoliberal ideas have become ever more prominent and other ideas marginalized. This, the paper has argued, reflects the emergence of a degree of post-political consensus around the role for urban policy and the mechanisms for its delivery. This conclusion rests on three elements.

First, the paper has argued that consensus has hardened around the view that the primary purpose of area-based policy is to fuel economic growth, and that wider distributional concerns related to socio-spatial equity have been accorded less importance (under the Blair and Brown governments) or to a large extent have been discarded (under the Cameron administration). LEPs, EZs, and RGF all share an emphasis on the promotion of economic development which continues the thrust of policy under the previous administration. What has changed, however, is the emphasis on addressing spatial aspects of social exclusion. There is no equivalent of the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, which—whatever its limitations—was viewed by proponents within government as a systematic, evidence-based attempt to address the geographical manifestations of poverty. Nor is there any longer any attempt by the centre systematically to determine the

allocation of regeneration funds by identifying impoverished neighbourhoods. Formula-based funding—used to determine the distribution of a large share of National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal funding, via the Index of Multiple Deprivation—has been replaced by a return to discretionary allocation of resources to bidding partnerships on a competitive basis.

The point here is not that contemporary urban policy in England excludes progressive dimensions. As Cochrane (2007, pp. 125–126) notes, the complexity and heterogeneity of urban policy can be easily forgotten as researchers attempt to demonstrate the degree to which neo-liberalism dominates policy concerns—especially when they set out to ‘fit’ the empirical realities of different policies to a wider storyline about the rise of neo-liberal thinking. Nonetheless, the overall direction of policy is one that privileges economic growth and which employs a formula that draws in large measure on neo-liberal thinking. And where apparently redistributive policies do feature, it is possible to argue that they are viewed as means rather than ends, linked to what Buck *et al.* (2005) call the ‘new conventional wisdom’ in urban economic development, which holds that maintenance of a minimum degree of social cohesion forms a more stable basis for long-term economic growth than do fractious social relationships and widespread poverty.

Second, the paper has argued that the strong degree of continuity in policy reflects the ongoing, and as yet incomplete, construction of a post-political consensus, from which oppositional voices are excluded. This does not imply that political discord has diminished as a feature of urban policy; conflict is clearly in evidence, especially where network-based local governance creates scope for tension linked to competing institutional loyalties. What is implied instead is that the potential for disputing neo-liberal orthodoxies is substantially reduced because of the potency and pervasiveness of the consensus about what is appropriate in terms of the role of the state and the nature of urban policy. Despite rhetoric about the importance of tailoring intervention to local circumstances, the potency of neoliberal consensus could be said to limit the scope for meaningful debate and genuine choice about the direction of policy.

Third, the paper has argued that embryonic policy under the Cameron government offers some support to the view that the ethos of policy might shift in a more decisive and transformative way, linked in particular to the

localism agenda and a still-evolving but imprecise desire to alter the relationship between citizen and state. It is in this respect that there must be a degree of uncertainty about the stability of post-political consensus, in that the localism agenda potentially introduces a significant dissonance to the stability of local political control of regeneration in which local state actors (from quangos as well as local authorities) have worked harmoniously alongside the private sector. Localism introduces the possibility of substantially broadening the range of actors involved in the policy process, as an ongoing round of austerity measures in Britain potentially prefaces a more radical dispersal of power away from the local state and towards a range of civil society groups. It is possible here to conceive of tension between, on the one hand, local groups mobilized around protectionist, reactionary issues, and—on the other hand—policy elites who continue to articulate the kind of pro-growth emphasis around which existing consensus has coalesced. That the Localism Act suggests that communities would be unable to prevent, say, designation of an Enterprise Zone or the release of housing land at a level lower than implied in the prevailing local authority plan, for example, may be seen as recognition of this potential tension. However far-reaching and well-established the existing consensus around mainstream forms of urban policy may appear, the localism agenda could yet exert a disruptive effect on business-as-usual orthodoxy in respect of the management of urban policy.

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The Delusion of Strategic Spatial Planning: What's Left After the Labour Government's English Regional Experiment?

MARK BAKER & CECILIA WONG

Mark Baker, Centre for Urban Policy Studies, School of Environment and Development, The University of Manchester, UK.

Abstract

In the UK, the Labour government (1997–2010) introduced various experiments to uplift English regional and sub-regional spatial strategy to a more prominent position in sub-national governance but much of this has been subsequently guillotined by the incoming Coalition government in May 2010. This paper assesses the prospect for the survival of strategic spatial thinking under the Coalition government's ethos of 'localism'. It first considers some of the broad conceptual issues relating to strategic spatial planning, identifying three key conundrums around flexibility of scaling, institutional structures and capacity, and core values and forms of knowledge. It then provides one of the first comprehensive accounts of what was achieved during the outgoing Labour administration, and what ultimately went wrong with the English regional planning project. Finally, an initial assessment is made of the future prospects for strategic planning in England to survive in new spatial contexts, despite the hostile conditions associated with the Coalition government.

Introduction

It has been over a decade since the publication of our paper (Baker *et al.*, 1999) on the newly elected Labour government's proposals for English regional institutions and strategy-making. The paper argued that these proposals represented a continuation of the historic disjunction between economic development and strategic planning and called for better integration. The irony is that a single integrated regional strategy was eventually proposed (CLG, 2009) towards the end of the Labour administration, but this was stillborn. Regional spatial planning in England has now entered a period of seeming bewilderment following the election of the Coalition government in May 2010. The change has been seen as a major shift from the previous top-down, target-driven approach of spatial planning to a more local oriented style. Within just a few weeks of coming to power, the new government announced the wholesale revocation of regional strategies (RS) (Quartermain, 2010) and subsequently abolished the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the regional Government Offices (GORs). The passing of the Localism Act 2011 formally abolished all RS. The prospects for continued strategic spatial planning at the sub-regional and regional scales, therefore, look bleak.

This paper aims to assess developments in strategic spatial planning during the years of the Labour government (1997–2010) and reflect upon the prospects for the survival of strategic forms of spatial planning under the Coalition government's ethos of localism. The next section provides a critical discussion of the conceptual basis and changing meanings of regional planning and strategic spatial planning and highlights some of the ideals and approaches advocated by academics for the future of strategic spatial planning. It then considers what was achieved, and what went wrong, with regard to the regional experiment and the evolution of strategic spatial planning, during the Labour administration. The discussion then turns to identifying the conundrums surrounding the assumptions and principles of strategic spatial planning as the backdrop to some reflections on the prospects for the survival of some forms of strategic spatial planning, even under the uncoordinated mantra of localism as espoused by the Coalition government.

From Regional Planning to Strategic Spatial Planning

In the 1990s, the region was widely seen as an appropriate scale for policy intervention and regulation in Britain (Baker *et al.*, 1999; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). After the election of the Labour government in 1997, institutional developments and regional policy frameworks were established to pursue regional planning and development agendas (Baker, 2002). A wholesale reform of the British planning system in the early-mid 2000s, culminating in the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* of 2004 (HM Government, 2004), marked the beginning of a new era of developing ‘spatial’ plans at different spatial scales that ‘...*goes beyond traditional land use planning to bring together and integrate policies for the development and use of land with other policies and programmes which influence the nature of places and how they can function*’ (ODPM, 2005a: para. 30). Spatial planning could thus be seen as a broad concept which ‘... *more centrally concerned with the problem of coordination or integration of the spatial dimension of sectoral policies through a territorially based strategy*’ (Cullingworth & Nadin, 2006, pp. 91–92). Another significant shift from previous practice was the emphasis on using an evidence-based approach to planning to ensure that spatial objectives and policies are achieved with clear and agreed implementation mechanisms (Baker & Wong, 2006; Wong *et al.*, 2006b). The new spatial planning approach also adopted the principle of collaboration and participation throughout the plan-making process (Baker *et al.*, 2010b).

According to the Royal Town Planning Institute (2007), spatial planning is about critical thinking about space and places as the basis for action or intervention. The role of spatial planning is seen as a coordinator, integrator and mediator of the spatial dimensions of wider policy streams. But this recent emphasis on the need to spatially integrate and co-ordinate different sectoral policies within agreed spatial frameworks bears an uncanny resemblance to Geddes’ (1915) synoptic vision of ‘place, work and folk’ to explain the symbiotic relationship between economic and socio-cultural well-being within defined regional areas. The emphasis on sustainability and the efficient use of resources in development similarly echoes Mumford’s (1938) ecological conception of a ‘regional city’, whilst the evidence and

knowledge-based approach towards spatial strategy development is similar to the traditional Geddesian principle of 'survey before plan'. The discussion here shows that the spatial planning principles stipulated in the 2004 English planning reforms were not brand new innovations. In fact, spatial planning very much follows the conception and methodological approaches advocated by the pioneering regional planners of yesteryear. However, the adoption of a multi-scalar concept of 'spatial' planning avoids the problem of dealing with specific spatial scales such as 'urban', 'regional' and 'sub-regional' planning as these can all be encapsulated and addressed under the aegis of strategic 'spatial' planning.

Meanwhile, academics across Europe (e.g. Kunzmann, 2000; Albrechts, 2004; Healey, 2006, 2007) have been keen to promote an ideal framework for strategic spatial planning. Albrechts argues that strategic spatial planning *'is a set of concepts, procedure, and tools that must be tailored carefully to whatever situation is at hand'* (2004, p. 748), but suggests that it should be *'a publicsector-led sociospatial process through which a vision, actions, and means for implementation are produced that shape and frame what a place is and may become'* (2004, p. 747). The key components of strategic vision, spatial and policy integration, action and delivery and balanced spatial development are not that different from the stated government objectives of spatial planning as set out in the reformed British planning system. However, Albrechts' emphasis is on planning as a socio-spatial process, after Healey (1997). Such authors advocate the importance of collaborative and inclusive governance in the spatial strategymaking process so that all actors are able to fully communicate and articulate their values, visions and ideas within the plan-making arena. Their ideas are, however, seen by Newman (2008) as a normative project, as there is little evident success in current practice to match the ideal. He suggests (Newman, 2008) that 'institutional void' (Hajer, 2003), difficulties in sustaining collective action and the limitation of having insufficiently reflexive actors are the main factors that undermine the transformation towards such ideal strategic spatial planning processes.

Beyond the governance issues, another major concern over the new practice of strategic spatial planning is the type of knowledge, values and rationality used in the problem solving process. Hajer (2003, p. 191) argues that the lack of clear and generally accepted rules and norms to conduct politics has posed the need to rethink the agenda of 'deliberative' policy analysis in terms of both content and process. He calls for the employment of multiple methods to deliberate policy issues interactively in order to

facilitate policy discussion in a more contextualized and meaningful way. Others (e.g. Albrechts, 2004; Alexander, 2009) have also focused on exploring the relationship between values, rationality and planning knowledge generation. There is an emerging consensus that different forms of rationality should be deployed interactively and dialectically to address different decision situations.

The discussion here raises some interesting points in relation to the framework of strategic spatial planning: The flexibility of scaling; the workability of institutional structure and capacity and the role of different forms of value and knowledge. These will be further discussed towards the end of this paper, following an examination of the success and failure of English regional planning to deliver strategic spatial planning over the last decade or so. [Table 1](#) provides a summary timeline of the major events and policy developments throughout this period.

A Fully-Fledged Experiment *Minus* Democracy?

By the early 1990s, planning in the UK was generally re-emerging from the market-oriented legacy of the Thatcher era (Thornley, 1993) and regional planning was back on the agenda in England in the form of Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) (DoE, 1992a, 1992b) following the almost complete abandonment of strategy-making at this scale during the 1980s (Breheny, 1991; Wannop & Cherry, 1994). Varying forms of joint collaborations of local authorities had begun to emerge in some regions as bottom-up responses to cross-boundary strategic and regional economic development issues (Thomas & Kimberley, 1996). Further stimulus to better collaboration within regions such as the North West of England also came from pressure for local authorities and other regional stakeholders to jointly develop regionally agreed economic strategies and priorities in order to leverage regional structure funds from the European Union (Baker & Hebbert, 1995). However, the resulting RPG (issued by the Secretary of State and not by the regional associations themselves) remained resolutely wedded to a narrowly conceived land use focus without any real regional specificity (Minay, 1992) and was tightly controlled by central government (Baker, 1998).

At the sub-regional scale, various rounds of local government re-organization during the early 1990s had complicated the pattern of local government in England by creating a number of unitary authorities in the larger town and cities of the shires to match those already found in the major urban areas, where conurbationwide structure plans had been abolished with the Metropolitan Councils back in 1986. But elsewhere, a two-tier system of county councils and district councils prevailed, with county structure plans providing continued strategic policy direction. However, there was a growing feeling that the structure planning process had lost its way and needed reform. A government sponsored review of English structure planning exposed a number of weaknesses including a loss of strategic focus, over-lengthy processes of plan preparation and that the geographical coverage of the county councils seldom equated with strategic functional areas, such as city-regions (Baker & Roberts, 1999).

The pace of change accelerated considerably after the election of the first Blair Labour government in 1997. This was a period of transition. The new government took stock of, and reviewed, inherited institutional frameworks, policies and strategies within the context of a set of political ideologies that characterized the New Labour agenda. Notions of ‘third way’ politics, evidence-based policy, sustainability and modernizing government were to have a marked influence on the evolving institutional frameworks and planning systems operating in the UK.

TABLE 1. The English planning framework

	Late 1980s	Early 1990–1997	1997–2004	2004–2010	2010–
<i>National Government</i>	Conservative (Thatcher PM)	Conservative (Major PM)	Labour (Blair PM)	Labour (Blair/Brown PM)	Coalition (Conservative Liberal Democrat) (Cameron PM)
<i>Key characteristics</i>	Physical land use planning; free-market orientation; planning by ‘appeal’	Physical land use planning; growing environmental concerns; ‘NIMBY’ attitudes	New labour: ‘third way’ politics; modernising planning; devolution; sustainable development; evidence-based policy	Spatial planning; collaborative approach; sustainable development; climate change; evidence-based policy	Localism; anti-regionalism growth agenda; ‘ <i>Presumption in favour of sustainable development</i> ’
<i>Key events</i>	<i>Lifting the Burden</i> White paper (1985); abolition of metropolitan counties and GLC (April 1986)	<i>Planning and Compensation Act 1991</i> : Introduction of ‘plan-led’ system; Creation of Regional Government Offices (GORs) English local government review	Creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Regional Assemblies (RAs); Green Paper: <i>Delivering a Fundamental Change</i> (2001) White Paper, <i>Your Region Your Choice</i> (2002) (subsequent ‘no’ vote in NE Region in 2004)	<i>Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004</i> ; <i>Planning White Paper</i> (2007) and <i>Planning Act 2008</i> ; Sub-national economic review (2007) and <i>Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009</i> ; abolition of regional assemblies and proposed new integrated regional strategy	Creation of Local Economic Partnerships (LEPs) <i>Localism Act 2011</i> : introduction of neighbourhood plan and local authority ‘ <i>duty to cooperate</i> ’; <i>Draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)</i> (2010)

Planning policy framework

National	Planning policy guidance (PPG) (first round, from 1988); Government Circulars	Planning policy guidance (PPG); circulars	Planning policy guidance (PPG); circulars	Planning policy statements (PPS); circulars	Draft national planning policy framework (NPPF) (to replace existing circulars, PPS, etc.)
Regional	PPG9: RPG for SE (DoE, 1988)	Regional planning guidance (RPG)	(Revised) Regional planning guidance (RPG)	Regional spatial strategies (RSS)	Abolition of RSS
Sub-regional	Strategic planning guidance (SPG) for metropolitan areas; structure plans	SPG/RPG (limited); structure plans	RPG (limited); structure plans	Sub-regional dimension of RSS; community strategies	Abolition of RSS; potential future sub-regional strategy development by LEI
Local	Unitary development plans (UDPs); local plans (optional)	Unitary development plans (UDPs); district-wide local plans	Unitary development plans (UDPs); district-wide local plans	Local development framework (LDF) including core strategy	LDFs/local plans neighbourhood plan (optional)

Note: Authors: compiled from various sources.

Under the banner of modernization (DETR, 1998), reviews of the operation of the planning system were set in train that culminated in the Green Paper, *Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change* (DTLR, 2001), which included a damning critique by the Secretary of State of the current land use planning system. The subsequent *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act* of 2004. This effectively abolished all the existing forms of plan—RPG, county structure plans, district-wide local plans and unitary development plans. Taking their place at the regional/subregional scale were new forms of Regional Spatial strategies (RSS) which would incorporate an explicit sub-regional dimension and be prepared by Regional Assemblies (ODPM,

2004a). At the local (municipal) scale, an entirely new form of local development plan was conceived in the form of the local development framework (LDF). Conceived as a portfolio of various statutory and optional development plan and procedural documents, the LDF's core strategy was intended to provide a long-term spatial vision for the area and the broad policies needed to achieve it (ODPM, 2004b).

The 2004 Act and its associated government policy statements and regulations emphasized a new 'spatial planning' approach. Reflecting the general thrust of the Blair and Brown Administrations towards evidence-based policy development (ODPM, 2002b; Wong *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b), there was also a new-found emphasis on developing an appropriate evidence base to spatial policy which found expression in the testing of emerging LDF and RSS documents through the public examination process in terms of their 'soundness' (ODPM, 2004b). But the 2004 Act did not mark the end of the story. Treasury led reviews of the supply of housing land (Barker, 2004) and land-use planning (Barker, 2006) continued to ask questions about the role of planning in encouraging (or stifling) economic growth and the delivery of infrastructure, influencing the content of a new Planning White Paper (CLG, 2007a) and the *Planning Act 2008*. Slow progress in LDF preparation alongside other lessons and challenges identified from practicebased research studies such as *Effective Practice in Spatial Planning (EPiSP)* (Morphet *et al.*, 2007) and *Spatial Plans in Practice (SPiP)* (CLG, 2008a) influenced subsequent streamlined guidance on LDF preparation (CLG, 2007b, 2008b) which emphasized a more co-ordinated approach to infrastructure delivery and policy implementation (Morphet, 2009, 2011).

The broader institutional and governance landscape was changing just as dramatically. Constitutional change and the devolution of government powers and responsibilities to the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly increased the separation of planning systems and procedures in the different territories of the UK and increased pressures for greater devolved regional government in England. The regional institutions of governance were significantly enhanced with the creation of the RDAs (DETR, 1997) and Regional Assemblies. Alongside the existing GORs, originally established by the Conservatives back in 1994 as an arm of central government in each English region, this resulted in a trio of bodies with responsibilities for regional planning and economic development (Baker, 2002). New forms of spatial planning strategies in, first, Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Department for Regional Development, 2001) and then

Wales (Welsh Assembly Government, 2004) and Scotland (Scottish Executive Development Department, 2004) inspired further thoughts of what might also be developed in England in terms of both calls for an explicit national (English) spatial framework (Wong, 2002) and more visionary approaches to regional strategy-making. The latter subsequently found some expression in revised RSS in regions such as Yorkshire and the Humber (Dabinett, 2009).

All this had implications for regional strategy-making. Potential strategic conflicts between the development-led priorities of the RDAs and the broader planning remit of RPG emerged as concerns, alongside debates over the extent to which the new arrangements might lead to genuinely 'regional-specific' planning as opposed to 'centralist regional planning'. Problems inherent in previous attempts at regional strategy making could be seen to have continued with the new structures. Three issues particularly stood out (Baker *et al.*, 1999): The inadequate powers of regulation or implementation available to regional institutions and the limited resources at their disposal; the lack of integration between physical land use, environmental and economic planning and a lack of central government willingness to embrace democratic accountability at the regional level. In other words, 'silo' perspectives remained the norm and the new institutional frameworks had not yet developed adequate means of collaboration and partnership that might lead to more integrated forms of spatial strategy development at the regional scale. An increasing number of voices thus concluded that more formal governance mechanisms, probably involving directly elected regional government, would be required to address these challenges.

For a brief period, it appeared that there was now a central administration that agreed with this. The White Paper, *Your Region Your Choice* (DTLR, 2002) set out the potential for directly elected regional government, provided that regionally-based referenda were supportive. However, despite strong support from the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, the failure to achieve a 'yes' vote in the North East in 2004 in what was to be the only referendum to be undertaken on this matter, led to the abandonment of ideas related to elected regional government. In hindsight, this effectively derailed the whole regional project.

But whilst the regional governance agenda was stalling, increasingly complex, spatially variable and multi-scalar arenas for newer forms of strategic governance and spatial planning and development were opening up at both the sub-regional and mega-regional scales. Between the traditional

English region and the state, The Government's *Sustainable Communities Plan* (ODPM, 2003) had focussed thinking on inter-regional linkages and strategy-making with its identification of four major growth areas that mostly straddled regional boundaries (Milton Keynes/Northampton; Stansted/Cambridge; Thames Gateway) and nine Housing Market Renewal Pathfinders in areas with failing housing markets in the north and midlands. The latter were incorporated into the *Northern Way* (ODPM, 2004a, 2004c; Northern Way Steering Group, 2004) strategy documents that represented a newly created 'soft space' of government (Haughton *et al.*, 2010) based around collaborative working between the three northern RDAs. The *Northern Way* identified a polycentric set of eight core city-regions across Northern England which strongly influenced the emerging spatial frameworks within RSS as well as providing further impetus to the broader city region governance agenda.

The spatial planning framework continued to evolve in the final years of the Labour administration within a broader governance architecture based around the preparation of sustainable community strategies, prepared by local strategic partnerships and implemented via the LDFs and local area agreements (Morphet, 2009). With the growing importance of the city-region as a spatial development concept (ODPM, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c), this architecture was extended into the sub-regional dimension via new multi-area agreements and the emergence of new forms of spatial strategy and collaborative institutional development at the cityregion scale. In the conurbations, collaborative mechanisms were revitalized, or newly emerged, and took their place at the vanguard of city-region scale collaborative governance, such as the Association of Greater Manchester Authorities and the recent proposal to establish a combined authority for Greater Manchester (CLG, 2010; HM Government, 2010b), and strategy development, such as for the Leeds City Region (Haughton *et al.*, 2010).

Finally, in what was to be the last developments under a Labour government, another major upheaval of regional scale strategy-making was put in train. The subnational review of economic development and regeneration (HM Treasury, 2007) and the *Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act, 2009* resulted in the abolition of regional assemblies and their replacement with regional Leaders Boards (such as 4NW in the North West region). New forms of integrated RS, prepared by the RDAs in association with the Leaders Boards, were intended to combine and replace the existing RSS and regional economic strategies

(RES) with a new form of integrated RS which would continue to be part of the statutory development plan for an area alongside the LDF (CLG/BIS, 2009).

The process was not without tension, most notably whether the predominantly private sector led RDAs could take on a more holistic vision of their respective regions and reconcile regional social and environmental issues alongside economic ones. However, the result—if it had been implemented—could have been the introduction, for the first time, of a single, integrated, spatial strategy within the English regions, backed up by an action and implementation plan based on the RDAs own economic development and regeneration resources and links to Whitehall, with sufficient authority to influence the behaviour and local strategies of both local government and other key stakeholders and delivery partners. Morphet (2011, p. 199), writing before the 2010 general election, thus commented that ‘... *regional spatial planning in England is still in development and will probably not see its fullest expression until beyond 2012*’.

However, it wasn't to be. Given the Conservative Party's commitment to removing all regional planning and housing powers from the RDAs and other regional bodies, it was no surprise when the election of a new Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in May 2010 heralded a wholesale dismantling of inherited RS (both RSS and the proposed integrated RS) and institutions (RDAs and GORs). The publication of the *Localism and Decentralisation Bill* (HM Government, 2010a) completed a trio of coalition documents issued in the last few months of 2010 that placed the emphasis squarely at the local level within a neo-liberal, macro-economic and generally aspatial context. Once again, the topsy-turvy world of English regional and sub-regional planning appears to have run its course, with a general failure to deliver on the ideals of its advocates or the principles of strategic spatial planning. But where did it all go wrong? Arguably, the failings of the regional planning project can be attributed to the three theoretical conundrums of strategic spatial planning frameworks, set out in the earlier part of this paper, concerning the flexibility of scaling; the lack of workable institutional structure and capacity and the inability to mediate different forms of value and knowledge.

The last decade has witnessed a multi-scalar approach to strategic spatial planning activities that have been variously targeted at different spatial scales from the mega-region (e.g. the *Northern Way*), through the traditional regions (e.g. RPG and RSS), to the former shire County structure plans and

the more strategic and visionary elements of the new LDF core strategies. However, inherent problems relating to the lack of fit between administrative, institutional and functional boundaries have prevailed. Formal exercises in spatial plan formulation below the nation state have, almost inevitably, involved the introduction of fixed, hardedged, boundaries with consequent challenges relating to cross-boundary issues and analysis. These become more acute the smaller the geographical units involved, as witnessed by the former shire county structure plans in areas such as Cheshire and County Durham that were cut off from the neighbouring city regions with which they were inextricably intertwined with on a functional basis.

But whilst freedom from the traditional county structure plan boundaries and a focus on larger spatial units might help address the ‘bigger picture’ and functional inter-relationships in a more holistic and integrated manner, the failure of the regional government agenda meant that increases in the spatial scale of operation have invariably also involved decreased democratic accountability, increased Abstraction from the concerns of local communities and high levels of central government intervention and dominance. The result has been a growing institutional and democratic void between the local level and the nation state, with first RPG and then RSS roundly criticized for being more akin to central government strategies *for* a region as opposed to locally distinctive and accountable strategies *of* each region. Mega-RS, such as the *Northern Way*, are even more explicitly centralized statements of government policy initiatives with responsibilities for co-ordinated management, development and delivery largely resting with the non-elected and centrally appointed RDAs. The same RDAs were also intended to lead the, now abandoned, moves towards integrated RS following sub-national economic review.

In any event, the exercises in RPG and RSS production exposed the weaknesses of decision-making by committee; all too commonly descending into lowest common denominator outcomes as regional assemblies and their successor leaders boards struggled to reach collective agreement on regional priorities and actions and, instead, resorted to bland ‘motherhood and apple pie’ statements that would offend none of their constituent authorities. The quality of integrated spatial analysis and strategy formulation also left a lot to be desired. Despite calls for better practice in spatial analysis, interpretation and monitoring, all too often annual monitoring exercises degenerated into unfocussed data collection and ‘bean counting’ without any

strategic purpose (Baker & Wong, 2006), echoing some of the failures of earlier episodes of regional and sub-regional strategy-making in the 1960s and 1970s which were also characterized by an over-reliance of data and technical analysis but failed to respond to rapid changes in the national economy and socio-demographic conditions. The failure to embrace a more diverse set of evidence sources (such as surveys of community perceptions) alongside more traditional, measurable 'facts' has thus fuelled criticisms (e.g. Albrechts, 2004) of the processes as overly narrow, technocratic and positivist in nature and lacking the visions, values and communicative actions necessary for more integrated and collaborative place-making. This was not helped by a general perception that the primary focus and importance of RPG and RSS rested almost exclusively on the allocation and distribution of regional and sub-regional housing and brownfield land development targets. Meanwhile, the tri-lateral institutional arrangements involving central government intervention via the GORs, economic strategy making by the RDAs and spatial planning by the regional assemblies, preserved the historic fissures between economic and spatial strategy development highlighted over a decade earlier (Baker *et al.*, 1999).

Despite this gloomy analysis, there are some aspects of English strategic spatial planning during the Labour years, however patchy and sporadic, that can still be highlighted as more successful. Indeed, a more optimistic stance can even identify some emerging features that might just form the basis for further development, or at least survival, of strategic spatial thinking under the Coalition's mantra of localism.

Compared to the strategic vacuum of the 1980s, regional and sub-regional planning was at least back on the agenda during the 1990s and more attention was, therefore, being paid to the importance of a wider, more strategic, perspective in which both interand intra-regional issues were afforded more significance. Despite the loss of 'old-style' structure plans, fears of a strategic deficit (e.g. Baker & Roberts, 1999, 2004) proved partly unfounded with the emergence of new approaches to sub-regional planning through the RSS and emerging city-region agendas. Freedom from previously rigid administrative county boundaries encouraged a degree of re-thinking of strategic spatial planning boundaries in some areas that were more clearly linked to functional inter-dependencies across city regions or which addressed cross boundary issues, such as the sub-regional growth strategies for Milton Keynes and the South Midlands and a cross-boundary

study of spatial inter-relationships between North West Cheshire and North East Wales (GVA Grimley, 2004).

Despite the flaws outlined above, evidence-based thinking became more embedded in this period and, at its most effective, led to more sophisticated forms of spatial analysis and collaborative approaches at the regional scale, such as the development of the Regional Observatory in the South West region (Baker & Wong, 2006) and intelligence gathering and evidence building for future integrated strategy development in the North West (NWDA, 2010). A new emphasis on functionalities had begun to emerge, based around the wider use of functional areas of analysis such as travel-to-work areas and strategic housing market areas (SHMAs). As a result, more integrated economic and spatial planning emerged for geographical areas that crossed, or even split-up, traditional local administrative boundaries such as city-regions; natural or environmentally defined water catchment areas or coastal zones; and strategic areas linked to the operations of other key agencies and delivery partners such as the Homes and Communities Agency's single conversation areas.

Coupled with the greater emphasis on more effective implementation linked to infrastructure provision (Morphet, 2009, 2011), all this helped encourage better horizontal and vertical collaboration between spatial planning authorities and other key delivery partners and stakeholders. This strengthened the integration and connection between policy sectors and, importantly, also improved the chances of implementation and delivery. The perceptions of RSS as primarily focussed on a single issue (housing targets) arguably masked important regionally-led developments in other areas such as biodiversity, green infrastructure, energy conservation and climate change. Even the focus on housing supply, and its location in terms of brownfield re-development, played a vital role in both addressing the growing crisis of housing need by encouraging the supply of new affordable and market-led housing in areas of acute need. Conversely, in areas such as the North West, tight housing controls in the more affluent, rural shires helped revitalize the housing markets in more deprived core city neighbourhoods as well as halting urban sprawl (Wong & Schulze Baing, 2010).

It is, of course, impossible to say with any certainty whether the new integrated RS proposed at the tail end of the Labour government would have been able to deliver a successful and fully integrated spatial strategy within the English regions. However, despite tensions, initial work on the

preparation of such a strategy in the North West region (NWDA, 2010) did at least demonstrate potential.

What's Left for Strategic Spatial Planning?

Bearing in mind the patchy successes over the previous decade, this section discusses the prospects for the survival of strategic spatial planning in England under the Coalition government's ethos of 'localism'. Once again, this discussion is framed around the three theoretical conundrums in respect of strategic spatial planning frameworks.

Spatial Scales and Functional Ties

Administrative areas tend to be used as the spatial entities to deliver planning policy and initiatives, but they do not necessarily define functional entities such as housing and labour market areas or river catchment areas (Wong *et al.*, 2006a, 2006b). The movement of population, investment, pollutants and traffic means that it is increasingly difficult to handle spatial planning issues within a tightly bounded local or regional planning framework. The crux of plan-making requires consideration of the wider spatial context and outcomes (positive, negative, displacement effects) for the surrounding areas. In ascertaining policy outcomes, it is arguably important that there is alignment between the space over which a particular policy is able to have an effect and the appropriate functional area (such as market areas). One of the consequences of failing to adequately reflect functional or market areas within measures of the spatial planning system is that policy can unwittingly encourage displacement activity. For example, Monk and Whitehead (1999) illustrated that differences in local planning regimes and market outcomes can lead to housing-led migration flows between neighbouring local authorities and that these exacerbate local house price differentials.

However, functional areas are not easy to define and the methods that have been employed to delineate them (e.g. in the housing and labour market contexts) are highly contested (Hincks & Wong, 2010; Jones *et al.*, 2010). This may involve a difficult process of disentangling data assembly from the

administrative geographies used for service delivery to more meaningfully constructed units that relate to neighbourhoods or market areas. Since places are connected in different ways to deliver different activities, there are multiple layers of administrative and functional geographies (Wong *et al.*, 2008; Baker *et al.*, 2010a). Certain functional areas may change over time; for example, if spatial planning seeks to influence the location of future housing provision, then this will in turn have an impact on the shape and extent of the functional market area for housing. While traditional thinking suggests that this is best undertaken at the regional and city-regional scale, the question here is whether strategic spatial planning can still be carried out at a more localized scale to reflect the functional ties between places and activities?

This discussion points to the fact that the relationship between administrative boundaries and functional areas is highly variable and that no single set of functional boundaries can fully satisfy the needs of complex spatial policies. Since there is no perfect set of boundaries, it is inevitable that spatial planning will be carried out by an administrative authority responsible for a particular set of geographies that may or may not follow any functional logic. Rather than arguing and shifting the spatial scales that are deemed as most appropriate to carry out strategic spatial planning, what really matters is that planners can think *spatially*; that is, have a good understanding that different planning issues are taking place at different spatial scales with differential spatial externalities and impacts brought by functional interdependency between sectors (see Wong *et al.*, 2006a, 2008). For example, in their recent study of the geographies of housing market areas in England, Jones *et al.* (2010, p. 35) argue that, ‘... *a consistently defined national tiered geography of housing market areas.. ... could facilitate local authorities and key stakeholders to think more robustly in spatial terms beyond their own administrative boundaries and better recognise the reality and circumstance of local and sub-regional housing markets*’.

Functional areas such as travel-to-work areas, housing market areas and flood risk areas are very useful analytical tools to derive knowledge and intelligence to address particular planning issues. Such areas provide flexible reference frameworks to inform policy-making and, in some cases, become a catalyst for local authorities to form partnerships to address different spatial issues of mutual interest. The Coalition government’s introduction of a ‘duty to co-operate’ through the *Localism Act 2011* may help to stimulate such

collaboration, though it is likely that the response will be, at best, sporadic. Whatever happens, the need for continued spatial analysis and evidence-based policy development at a strategic scale has not gone away, even under the current drive towards localism.

Centralized Decentralization

Before the 2004 reforms, the spatial co-ordination of land use and other sectoral development activities tended to occur at various tiers of the spatial hierarchy below the regional level (Roberts, 1996; Baker, 1998). The Labour government's final attempt to integrate different policy-sectors via a new integrated RS could be seen as a significant development towards some sort of spatial co-ordination of development activities at the regional scale. But while the stillborn integrated RS tried to resolve some of the longstanding tensions and conflicts that had previously surfaced between the RES and RSS, the fundamental problems lay more with the institutional deficiencies to develop the shared visions and integrative development required. Neither the Regional Assembly nor the RDA had the legitimacy of elected democracy, whilst the GOR was simply a regional arm of central government.

Under the Coalition government, the question is whether a strategic approach to spatial planning can survive under evolving institutional mechanisms and processes which are primarily designed to reflect the new localism agenda. The abolished RDAs will be replaced by local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) which are voluntary cross-authority collaborative partnerships involving local authorities and other partners on a voluntary basis. A total of 24 LEPs were initially approved by the government in October 2010 and it is interesting to note that 10 of them cut across regional boundaries. But there is little discussion of their potential role in replacing previous frameworks for strategic spatial planning at even sub-regional scales. While the LEPs are clearly charged with the local growth agenda and '*... will be free to work with partner planning authorities to develop strategic planning frameworks to address economic development and infrastructure issue*' (HM Government, 2010, para. 3.21), the *Local Growth* White Paper did not mention any similar arrangements for the governance structures, or the delivery approaches, of sub-regional *spatial* planning. There is clearly a serious institutional void between the need for some forms

of strategic spatial planning and the government's localized approach to plan-making.

The differential spatial contours created by different activities inevitably create inter-regional (and even cross-national) issues and thus pose the need for a broader spatial framework at the national or even supranational level. Indeed, the *Northern Way* strategy had been launched in 2004 with the intention, at a '*...pan-regional level ...to add value. ... [and not] replicate activity that properly takes place at regional or local level, but instead provide a mechanism to join up activity across boundaries where it makes sense to do so*' (Northern Way, 2010). One option to help fill the institutional vacuum outlined above is to introduce an explicit national spatial planning framework for England or the UK; the case for which has been made analytically by Wong *et al.* (2000, 2006a) and in a major national consultation exercise by the TCPA (2006).

Land use change and development tends to proceed at a slower pace than more dynamic activities such as commuting patterns, migration and traffic flows. In time, this inevitably results in some economic and environmental crises such as property cycles, house price inflation, traffic congestion and lack of housing land. These tensions point to a need to take a more strategic approach at the national level to guide major development activities. During the past decade, the only documents that vaguely resembled the makings of a national spatial planning framework for England were the sustainable communities plan (ODPM, 2003) and related documents (e.g. ODPM, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a, 2005b) which were issued by the Whitehall with limited advance notice or consultation

The *Local Growth* White Paper (HM Government, 2010b, para. 3.16) stated that the government would develop a simple national planning framework to cover all forms of development. However, the word 'spatial' was not mentioned and, when it finally emerged, the subsequent publication of the draft national planning policy framework (NPPF) (CLG, 2011) confirmed that the government merely had in mind a slimmed-down compilation of different 'aspatial' national planning policy statements to replace the earlier forms of Planning Policy Statements and Planning Policy Guidance.

The Coalition government's fixation on a more localized approach to planning may, ironically, necessitate further centralization by Whitehall through more stringent guidance to bridge the growing institutional gap of coordinating major spatial development strategies. As already stated in the

White Paper (HM Government, 2010b, para. 3.22), ‘...*some nationally important decisions need to be taken at the national level*’. In this context, Goodstadt (2010, p. 286) has recently argued the importance of the strategic dimension to local initiatives, pointing out that ‘*effective localism cannot flourish in a vacuum*’. The irony is that the government’s publication of the first ever *National Infrastructure Plan* (HM Treasury and UK Infrastructure, 2011) provides much more spatial expression of major infrastructure investments and projects over the UK, while the draft NPPF remains aspatial in its content (see Wong *et al.*, 2012).

Values, Rationality and Assumptions in Favour of Economic Growth

The 2004 overhaul of the planning system did signify a collective will to inject different values and rationalities to the plan-making process. This was reflected by the front-loaded requirements of having a statement of participation, and the involvement of key stakeholders, in the formulation of core strategies, as well as the strong emphasis on sustainable development (ODPM, 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2005a). There was also a much heightened emphasis in the importance of evidencebased policy-making, reflected in the tests of ‘soundness’ of LDF documents and in the formal arrangements for monitoring via annual monitoring reports (AMRs). However, while the government’s issued guidance strongly promoted the importance of using and interpreting different types of evidence, including both quantitative and quantitative information, the agenda had been dominated by the use of quantitative indicators to monitor policy progress (ODPM, 2005b).

More broadly, the Labour government shifted the emphasis further towards a macro-economic driven management regime to spatial planning. The Treasury increasingly seemed to view planning as an obstacle for economic development. This was reflected in the two reviews of housing and land use planning led by Kate Barker, a senior Treasury official. Both of these ‘Barker’ reviews adopted a nonspatial and macro-economic approach to examine key housing and planning issues. This led to the development of space-blind national housing targets that failed to deliver, even at the peak of the property market (Wong *et al.*, 2009). As a consequence, the sustainable development ethos to spatial planning was seriously undermined by the economic drivers and evidence developed by the Treasury and the National Housing Planning Advisory Unit. As Wong and Watkins (2009) argue, the

British planning system has been under attack from free market economists, public choice theorists and, since the 1980s in particular, through the work commissioned and published by New Right think tanks (Pennington, 2000; Evans & Hartwich, 2005; Cheshire & Hilber, 2008). These overarching values and assumption of the government had significantly affected the framing and articulation of spatial planning policies by the latter half of 2000s.

A macro-economic perspective to public policy management continues to be firmly held by the Coalition government. The publication of the *Local Growth* White Paper (HM Government, 2010b) was closely followed by the Treasury's (2010b) *The path to strong, sustainable and balanced growth* document and the core values, knowledge and references cited in these documents are again fuelled with market-led macro-economic analysis. It is equally no surprise to find that the government's underlying rationale for the planning system is that it should be '*light-touch, fast and responsive*' (HM Government, 2010b, para. 3.14) and '*to transform from an impediment to economic development into a means of economic growth*' (para. 3.6). While the previous Labour government was arguably pursuing a neo-liberal, market-driven agenda that was partly masked behind the rhetoric of sustainable development, the subsequent statements of the coalition suggest a more upfront shift to economic growth. Due to major cuts in public finance, the money available for undertaking major public participation exercises or in-depth independent research analysis is also likely to be significantly limited. As a result, the values and knowledge used to inform the future planmaking process will be highly constrained.

Prospects for English Strategic Spatial Planning

The observations in this paper have been informed by the authors' reflections of their own experience of working as independent researchers on a variety of research and consultancy projects related to the shaping of English strategic spatial planning over the past decade. The resulting analysis of planning events can be seen as a nuanced account of the ways in which practices and institutions are transformed over time through a process of experimentation and policy rupture as neo-liberalization itself changes and planning processes evolve in an attempt to resolve inherent scalar tensions and discontinuities. Examples of this have included the introduction

of new regional institutions; the loss of the counties' traditional strategic planning role; the transformation from land use to spatial planning; the 2004 reforms and the rise of the city-region agenda.

Nonetheless, at least up until the arrival of the coalition government, the story has arguably also been as much about a slower-paced process of institutional development, professional inertia and policy seepage in the light of lessons learnt than one of cataclysmic change and leaps forward into the unknown. Examples here might include the more gradual transformations from voluntary regional associations to more formalized regional assemblies; from RPG to RSS and the proposed integrated RS; from ad hoc policy implementation and monitoring to more coordinated infrastructure delivery plans and AMRs and from isolated examples of cross boundary working to more widespread sub-regional collaboration across functional areas such as SHMAs.

So where does all this leave the future prospects for strategic spatial planning. The simple answer would be 'in a lot weaker position than was expected a decade or so ago'. The Coalition government has seemingly turned its back on the strategic elements of spatial planning and swiftly removed all inherited RS and institutions. There are also questions over the commitment to delivering sustainable development, given the general tendency of both the old and new administrations to highlight macro-economic issues above all else within a general neoliberal agenda. However, there surely remains an imperative for strategic thinking even if the region is no longer seen as the optimal spatial focus for this. Spatial planning issues seldom respect lower-tier administrative boundaries and will still need addressing on a cross-boundary basis. Better understanding and analysis of functional inter-relationships via the use of housing market areas, travel-to-work areas and environmentally derived spatial units can be used to underpin collaborative initiatives between neighbouring local authorities and key stakeholders. This much is even acknowledged in the Coalition Government's Localism Act 2011 with its statutory duty to cooperate and re-emphasized in the draft NPPF (CLG, 2011, para. 44) which states that '*... public bodies have a duty to cooperate on planning issues that cross administrative boundaries, particularly those which relate to strategic priorities...*'.

Despite the more formal duties to cooperate in the Localism Act, the most effective future collaborative arrangements will probably be of a voluntary nature, City regions and newly-formed LEPs can be expected to provide a

focus for much of this activity, but other initiatives and spatial units may also emerge. Indeed, varied and multi-scalar approaches will be needed to best address different issues, so both collaboration and geographical coverage are likely to be fluid. The trends already apparent towards non-statutory soft spaces and fuzzy boundaries may well accelerate as the remnants of ‘official’ boundaries and institutions above the municipality are swept away. The responses, and their effectiveness, will be patchy and sporadic but the removal of the more formal regional agenda does provide the opportunity for flexibility and experimentation. A greater focus on more tightly drawn, and functionally-based, sub-regional geographical areas—as opposed to the more constraining dominance of traditional regional boundaries that were, arguably, too large to have any real meaning—could be a genuinely positive development. Equally, the more voluntary approach to sub-regional collaboration may mean a greater chance of innovative and visionary outcomes, jointly formulated and delivered by willing collaborators, as opposed to politically-driven lowest common denominator blandness.

The result, as argued by the guest editors of this collection (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009, 2010) may well be that *‘less may be more’* in some places and localities. The problem is that this may only happen in a few isolated areas, producing pockets of surviving strategic thinking in a surrounding strategic vacuum. There is also a significant danger of the exclusion of dissenting voices, heightened by the non-statutory and non-elected basis of these LEPs and other sub-regional groupings and the continued central government focus on neo-liberal growth agendas. Collaborative spatial planning ideals from the new Labour era—inclusion, participation, stakeholder and community involvement and transparency—will still be crucial in this context as the perennial conundrums of scaling, institutional structures and core values are grappled with by new combinations of practitioners and interested parties across the public, private and voluntary sectors and civil society. Nevertheless, in the longer term, emerging examples of the best and most innovative practice might just form the basis behind the next period of rediscovery of the regional and sub-regional planning agenda. The topsy-turvy history of regional planning in England over the last three-quarters of a century suggests that this will come along sooner or later.

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Rescaling of Planning and Its Interface with Economic Development

LEE PUGALIS & ALAN TOWNSEND

Dr Lee Pugalis, School of the Built and Natural Environment, Northumbria University, UK.

Abstract

Following the installation of a UK Coalition Government in 2010, ways of governing the spatial organization of development have undergone far-reaching change in England. Within a context of austerity following the abolition of regional policy machinery, and an onerous national target framework, localities are entering a new phase of incentivized development. Consequently, local planning authorities are having to transfer part of their focus from government's 'top-down' requirements, as they come to embrace more adequately 'bottom-up' neighbourhood scale plans. Analysing the path of change, especially at the interface between planning and economic development, the paper draws attention to the dilemmas arising from these crucial scale shifts, and explores the potential of sub-national governance entities—Local Enterprise Partnerships—to help resolve the strategic co-ordination of planning.

Introduction: The Context for Change

Over the past decade, reforms to statutory planning systems, economic development practice and sub-national governance arrangements across

Europe and further afield have tried to embrace change in contemporary spatial dynamics (Healey, 2004; Gualini, 2006). Across nearly all European countries it is the norm for ways of governing the spatial organization of development at a sub-national level to be supported by either elected or nominated devolved administrations (Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). These ‘middle tiers’ of government, including for example *regions* in Italy, Belgium and France, and *Laˆnder* in Germany, have burgeoned in number, range and importance over the last 60 years. In the UK, such devolved administrations are at work for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Each has regular elections and possesses legislative authority across a broad range of policy areas. England, accounting for 85% of the UK’s population, is the prominent omission or ‘gaping hole’ (Morgan, 2002) from the UK’s devolutionary map. The area has remained outside the EU’s so-called ‘reg-leg’ grouping of regions that possess legislative powers. This is all the more intriguing considering that the nine English regions—as defined by previous Government Office Regions’ (GORs) boundaries but without any defined position in law—had the largest average size of region across the EU, with 5.8 million average population per region (outside London), compared with 2.2 million in the rest of the EU.

The UK’s Blair-Brown Labour administration (1997–2010) intended to introduce elected Regional Assemblies (RAs) to plug this ‘hole’, but the first and only referendum on this, in North East England, turned down the proposal (Shaw & Robinson, 2007). As a result, in 2010 England remained one of the most centralized units in the OECD countries: approximately three-quarters of Local Authority income was directly derived from the central state, which placed England ‘at one extreme of the European spectrum’ in the words of the Communities and Local Government (CLG) select committee (House of Commons (HOC), 2009, p. 46). Atkinson (2010) has pointed out that the reverse is true in Denmark and Sweden, where local government generates about three-quarters of its own revenue, concluding that, despite 13 years of Labour Government’s devolutionary rhetoric, local government flexibility remained inhibited (Atkinson, 2010).

With the installation of a Coalition Government in 2010, England once again found itself at a key juncture; embroiled in another quest to fill the ‘missing middle’ with some form of sub-national governance arrangements (Harding, 2000; Shaw & Greenhalgh, 2010; Pugalis & Townsend, 2012), accompanied by a government ‘localism’ agenda which sought to devolve a

wide range of service delivery functions to local government, as well as to other external actors, including business and community organizations. In the time elapsed since the May 2010 general election, means of governing the spatial organization of development have undergone far-reaching change. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, the disbanding of regional machinery (outside of London), the establishment of 39 state-championed sub-national Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs),¹ and the Localism Act,² which legislates for the initiation of substantial planning machinery at the neighbourhood scale, a level equivalent to the *communes* of France or Italy.

A further key aspect of the context for change was the internationally experienced ‘credit crunch’ and subsequent crisis of public debt after many countries bailed-out their banks, and sustained additional welfare costs in the wake of the recession (Murphy, 2009; Lovering, 2010). Broadly speaking, the UK’s geography of recession widened the gap between the traditionally more vibrant local economies and the ‘usual’ problem areas, predominantly located in the north, midlands and Wales (Fingleton *et al.*, 2012). The Coalition Government acted on the belief that the UK debt was unsustainable and should be eliminated within five years through a rigorous programme of public expenditure cuts (HM Treasury, 2010b), which included dismantling regional machinery and regeneration programmes. The *Spending Review 2010* identified that Local authorities’ Whitehall grants were to be reduced by 27% in real terms by 2014–2015, commencing with a 10% cut in 2011–2012, marking ‘the beginning of the most severe period of fiscal retrenchment in Britain for more than three decades’ (Horton & Reed, 2011, p. 64).

Alongside the Coalition’s austerity measures and institutional ‘decluttering’, a change to an alternative political philosophy and an associated policy agenda were proposed (see, for example, HM Government, 2010b; Tam, 2011; Pugalys & Townsend, 2012). A key aspect of reconfiguring England’s spatial organization of development at the sub-national scale is encapsulated in the LEP project, undertaken to ‘represent a new deal for local regeneration and economic development: namely locally led agencies working in real economic areas, which bring business and civic leaders together in focused effective partnerships’ (Spelman & Clarke, 2010, p. 2). LEPs, first proposed by the Conservatives, were quickly agreed upon by the Coalition (HM Government, 2010a) and the *Budget 2010*

confirmed that they would ‘replace’ Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) (HM Treasury, 2010a). The latter were each charged with promoting the economic development of their region, including the production of a Regional Economic Strategy (RES) on behalf of the region (Gough, 2003; Mawson, 2009; Pugalis, 2010).

Prior to their demise, RDAs had been handed additional responsibilities under Brown’s Labour Government. One of these tasks was a more prominent role in the statutory planning process, including joint responsibility alongside locally elected leaders for devising a Regional Strategy (RS) (Townsend, 2009). This was intended to ‘integrate’ RESs and Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). The former had provided the overarching framework for securing RDA ‘single pot’ and European funding (Pugalis & Fisher, 2011), whereas the latter had provided the machinery for strategic co-ordination of local authority plans and major development applications (Baker *et al.*, 2010). The Coalition government attempted to repeal these at a very early point in May 2010, but a legal determination delayed these powers till the passing of the Localism Act 2011. In June 2010, the business secretary and communities secretary wrote to ‘business leaders’ and Local Authorities, inviting multi-sector cross-boundary partnerships to put forward bids to establish LEPs reflecting ‘natural economic areas’, which might cover planning, housing, transport and tourism policy remits, as well as more traditional economic development activities (Cable & Pickles, 2010). The deadline of September that year pre-empted any consultation on the abolition of RDAs and was issued prior to publication of any policy-guidance on the scope and functions of LEPs. The publication of the Government’s *Local growth* ‘White Paper’ (HM Government, 2010b), delayed till October 2010, set out permissive policy-guidance relating to LEPs, and the abolition of the RDAs, amongst many other aspects of the spatial organization of development. However, these bold moves fundamentally to reconfigure sub-national development institutions were cause for concern in the development industry and professions (see, for example, Bentley *et al.*, 2010; Pugalis, 2010; 2011c). Working within a context of austerity, localities entered a new phase of *incentivized* development.

This research examines a fast-moving policy agenda, which at times has been complicated by ministerial disputes, departmental rivalries and policy reversals (Pugalis, 2011a). The paper looks through a two-year window of

policy change since the election of the Coalition Government, to examine successively both the rescaling of planning and, more specifically, its interface with economic development. Of central concern is the dismantling of the inherited regional machinery, including RDAs and regional strategy functions, together with the purported ‘shifting’ of power to local communities at the neighbourhood scale (HM Government, 2010b). In consequence, Local Planning Authorities will be required to transfer *part* of their focus from government’s ‘top-down’ requirements, as they come to embrace both a radically streamlined new set of guidance for planning decisions (CLG, 2011) and new ‘bottom-up’ neighbourhood scale plans. Analysing the path of change, the paper draws attention to the dilemmas arising from some of the major scale shifts in hand, and explores the *potential* of sub-national governance entities—LEPs—to help resolve the strategic co-ordination of planning. This does not reflect criticism of the dropping of the RSSs as such, but offers a practical policy solution following the revocation of RSSs *without replacement*. In doing this, some policy-relevant implications are teased out.³

The remainder of the paper is composed of six sections. Firstly, a theoretically informed historical account of the reworking of geographical scales of policy-governance is provided. By analysing past modes of working at different scales, Labour’s legacy of policy-governance configurations is clarified. This is then followed by a short section outlining the Coalition’s rescaling strategy, which provides the conceptual frame for subsequent sections that examine rescaling from 292 Local Authorities to, potentially, thousands of neighbourhoods in an incentivized development regime, and the transition from nine regions to 292 Local Authorities and 39 LEPs. The paper identifies a new framework for development in which regional policy is being replaced by public-private economic governing entities known as LEPs. The penultimate section then considers how the ‘gaping hole’ left for (sub-regional) strategic planning might be filled, before drawing some conclusions in the final section.

Reworking of Geographical Scales of Policy-Governance

Processes of spatial rescaling are by definition some of the most fundamental occasions of change in the organization of spatial patterns of development (Brenner, 2003; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2009). The significance of state rescaling strategies extends beyond the ‘passing’ of powers and responsibilities from one tier to the next to encompass new policy frames and, thus, new scales of governance, working relations, interventions and contestation (Brenner, 2004; Jessop, 2004; Brenner, 2009; Lord, 2009; Shaw & Greenhalgh, 2010; Stead, 2011). This section, therefore, retraces past English rescaling specific to planning and economic development.

Past Scales of Approach in Planning and Economic Development

It is generally agreed that UK regional policy came to prominence during the 1930s (see, for example, McCrone, 1969). Since the policy recognition of the so-called ‘regional problem’ during this period, new policy ‘experiments’ have been sought and implemented; often after economic downturns and general elections (Deas & Ward, 1999), including the period under study in this paper. Whilst the reasons for policy transformation are diverse, the main rescaling tendency in the past has been one of concentration in larger units, including innovations to fill the ‘missing middle’ between the local and the national. In 1931, for example, there were 97 voluntary Town Planning Regions covering two or more of the local authorities across England (then numbering more than 1000) (Cherry, 1974). It is in this context that in 1947 a Labour Government set control of planning at the upper-tier level of England’s two-tier structure of local government. Following one of the earliest academic considerations of ‘city regions’ by Dickinson (1947) and Derek Senior’s case for the ‘city region as an administrative unit’ in the mid-1960s (Senior, 1965), it was also Labour which instituted a move toward metropolitan scales of government in the *Royal Commission on Local Government in England, 1966–1969* (the Maud Report) (Redcliffe-Maud, 1969). Subsequently, in 1974, Labour established, for the first time, regional institutions with complete coverage across England.

Conservative governments on the other hand have had a tendency to revert to more local approaches. Indeed, they legislated for the Local Employment Act in 1960 as their favoured tool of development policy (in

place of Labour's more geographically expansive Development Areas), and for the present lower-tier 'districts' created in 1974 *in reaction to* Maud, which they also designated Planning Authorities, and *abolished* Regional Economic Planning Councils in 1979 and metropolitan counties in 1985. Even so, the approaches of Labour and the Conservatives have sometimes coalesced and there has been much continuity accompanying experimental changes (Deas, Forthcoming). For example, the Conservative Government led by John Major restored and regularized GORs in 1994 (Mawson & Spencer, 1998), leaving only a small number of regional boundary changes to the incoming Labour Government of 1997 (Mawson, 1998) to align the territories of RDAs. GORs were restored across England, in part to comply with European requirements, and they were subsequently deployed to administer European funding (Pugalis & Fisher, 2011); however, they also proved to be a key administrative instrument that helped to coordinate the work of different Whitehall-based departments in the regions (Mawson *et al.*, 2008) and provide a government presence in the regions. In these respects, England's regional project could be viewed as a top-down, centrally orchestrated form of decentralization. Labour did, however, instigate a plan-led system of Local Development Frameworks intended to create space for 'up-front' community engagement (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2005; Bailey, 2010) and also supported the production of Parish Plans in the last 10 years. Hence, the Coalition's new neighbourhood scale of planning takes forward a field of some convergent thinking. Typically, the pots of public funding shrank under a Conservative Government, therefore reducing the size and scale of 'assisted areas', such as Development Areas, supported by Labour administrations.

The 1997–2010 Labour Government had set out to 'modernize' public service delivery through a plethora of reforms intended to 'join up' government activity. This included the transfer of administration of European funding from GORs to RDAs, which helped align and 'match' European monies with the RDAs' single pot of regeneration funding, and repeated attempts to speed up the planning system. However, Labour's espoused 'evidence-based' policy approach further complicated an already confusing institutional landscape. Gordon Brown's policy initiative to integrate planning and economic development, spearheaded by the intention to produce single RSs, was inspired by a brand of neoliberalism designed to meet the demands of business, as set out in the *Review of sub-national*

economic development and regeneration (SNR) (HM Treasury, 2007). The outcome of incremental change, new and supposedly innovative policy measures, and a dense network of governance entities was multi-scalar confusion and scalar competition. It was a safe prediction before the election that a different government might reject the partly unimplemented regional scale of work and seek to remove some of the congestion in the policy map (see, for example, Johnson & Schmuecker, 2009). The next section considers the Coalition's shifts in scales of work.

The Coalition's Rescaling Strategy

In terms of the issue of scales of governance, there has been growing policy agreement that the EU concept of subsidiarity—devolving power and resources to the lowest appropriate spatial scale—will produce optimum outcomes on the ground (see, for example, Communities and Local Government (CLG), 2008). The notion of subsidiarity accords with the widely accepted view that grassroots consultation and 'bottom-up' views should be reconciled with 'top-down' policy activity. Conceptualizing this space between the family and the state, political theorists draw on the notion of 'civil society' (Gramsci, 1971). It is along similar lines that the Coalition Government seeks to redistribute or 'shift' power by drawing on local networks of voluntary organizations, community initiatives and market solutions. Coalition measures of decentralization—whether to a diverse constellation of interests or to collectivities including direct consumers, local providers, in the case of more than 250 Clinical Commissioning Groups and directly elected officials, in the case of 41 Police Commissioners and city mayors—have nevertheless also accompanied several development functions being returned to Whitehall and a deepening of the long trend of the neoliberalization of urban policy, including privatization (Deas, Forthcoming).

Viewed through a political lens, the dismantling of regional institutions can be seen to accord with the interest of the Coalition parties' local government elected members and voters, concentrated in the south generally (Harding, 2010). This spatially distinct network of communities of political interest identified 'regions' as a leading feature of Labour's 'top-

down bureaucracy'. Political and policy issues converged to condemn Labour's regional approach over three primary narratives: democratic accountability, scale in terms of relevance to functional economic area, and organizational effectiveness (Pugalis, 2011b). In addition, Labour's frequent changes to the planning system had caused some confusion and reaction on the ground, culminating in their enforcement of RSS housing targets from 2005 (Allmendinger and Haughton, Forthcoming). As a result, regional administrative activities, functions and responsibilities were in effect condemned through the publication of the Coalition's *Programme for Government* (HM Government, 2010a), along with the public cull of many QUANGOs. However, there is the view that the Coalition forfeited the opportunity to *simplify* (with private sector input and a democratic mandate) emerging integrated RSs that aimed to unify the predominantly land-use and environmental aspects of the RSS with the economic imperatives of the RES (Townsend, 2009; Baker and Wong, Forthcoming). In terms of spatial rescaling, the Coalition's radical reforms to planning involved three inter-related shifts, which the paper goes on to examine:

1. Empowering local communities, with plan-making powers at the neighbourhood scale;
2. Relaxation of national rules through a permissive and incentivized approach;
3. Removal of the regional tier of work, with responsibilities transferring to 292 Local Planning Authorities.

Rescaling in Planning: From 292 Local Authorities to Thousands of Neighbourhoods

A common theme in rescaling lies in Conservative adherence to their concept of democracy, including new forms of direct democracy and 'self help' (HM Government, 2011). What were the precedents for neighbourhood scale planning and do they represent a radically new mode of operation? Neighbourhood planning has an extensive lineage and global resonance (Kearns & Parkinson, 2001; Musterd & Ostendorf, 2008), though

much of this concerned the design level and comprehensive redevelopment areas (Neal, 2003; Lawless *et al.*, 2010). Decisively, in England the neighbourhood scale had no independent role in the statutory planning system. Nevertheless, New Labour had increasingly required community involvement, particularly through up-front consultation, adopting principles remarkably similar to those pioneers of planning, such as Patrick Geddes and Lewis Mumford (Baker and Wong, Forthcoming). In addition, Parish Councils (some known as Town Councils) regularly provide their views (as statutory consultees) about current applications to their respective Local Planning Authorities (LPAs): the 292 ‘lower-tier’ authorities. They were also taking the option developed by the government department for rural affairs to institute Parish Plans, drawn up ‘at the grassroots’ by parish councillors and residents of individual rural villages. These plans, however, tending to concentrate on traffic problems and affordable housing as well as on spatial planning matters *per se*, often failed to enter the statutory planning system and did not prevent affordable housing in rural areas becoming an issue of national significance (Taylor, 2008).

Were the councillors who composed the Planning Committees of LPAs constrained before 2011? Basically, they were able to approve or refuse applications subject to working within the approved development plan for the area, which included the relevant parts of the RSS and national policy. Refusals of planning permission could be the subject of appeals to an Inspector, and there was machinery for the GOR, on behalf of the Secretary of State, to ‘call in’ significant schemes and those where approval might be considered a departure from the plan. The Coalition, while retaining the appeal system, claims to be providing a new freedom from top-down controls and targets, and instituting a presumption in favour of sustainable development (see below). Contrary to some impressions, the Localism Act has not, however, legislated for a new level of Planning Committees to determine applications. Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs), once approved through voting in local referenda, will define specific developments or types of development which will have automatic planning permission through Neighbourhood Development Orders (NDOs) (i.e. bypassing Planning Committee consideration), *subject to* compatibility with the development plan. These arrangements are linked with the broader notion of the new ‘Community Right to Build’, originally announced for village housing sites. These measures together raise substantial questions.

How are these new neighbourhood spaces of planning to be defined? Established Parish Councils are intended to take up the new planning role where they exist. However, in non-parished areas, the establishment of new Neighbourhood Forums to take up the same task across urban areas, with their inherent morphological and social variety, can be seen as problematical (Bishop, 2010a), and are to be defined on the initiative of communities. Whilst it is likely that the geographies of NDPs will emerge through a process of bottom-up (community) and top-down (LPA) negotiation, it may be less straightforward to ensure that their boundaries meet up. Thus, neighbourhood planning in England may emerge in a patchwork fashion with extensive swathes of the country devoid of a NDP, and other neighbourhoods prone to capture by particular interests. This is particularly pertinent when one considers that the 'business community' of an area (who might not be residents) are being actively encouraged by government to bring forward NDPs. The Coalition expects technical and professional support to be provided by LPAs. Yet, faced with budgetary pressures that have resulted in a reduction of planning officers over the last few years, together with 'learning the game' of a reconstituted planning system, many LPAs will struggle to provide Parish Councils/Neighbourhood Forums with the necessary support. Such a scenario was expected to favour some places, arguably at the expense of others. Indeed, Bishop (2012, p. 16) went on to report that emerging research 'suggests that those communities coming forward wishing to do NDPs are almost all wealthy community-minded and professionalized. They are also still mainly rural and generally anti-development'.

How much can the balance of power swing to the local level? The regular political activity of an LPA (Townsend, 2002) provides the scope and space for residents and other interests to object to negative externalities imposed by developments contained in new planning applications, such as waste incinerator schemes. Nevertheless, Hillier (2009) recognizes that disruptive uses have to go somewhere. Left entirely to themselves, residents are likely to pass the negative externalities on to other people in other parishes, neighbourhoods or LPA areas. There is a legitimate concern that the interests of the different 'neighbourhoods' of an LPA may not add up to those of the whole area, which will focus attention on the power dynamics between NDPs and local plans. It is argued by government that maximizing local involvement and approval might even increase the acceptance of

development (HM Government, 2010b). Yet, in a survey of villages, Gallent and Robinson (2010) found that people would prefer a more responsive system rather than greater responsibility. Perhaps the biggest questions are those of practicality. Many local regeneration partnerships of the Labour period were vulnerable to ‘capture’ by interest groups (Liddle & Townsend, 2003), while parish councils vary greatly in scope and competence. The lower tier potentially involves no less than 17,000 to 18,000 plans for all neighbourhoods and Parishes of England (Bishop, 2010a, 2010b). As some areas opt not to take part, there will, potentially, be important power imbalances, with areas with energetic groups capturing more benefits or displacing externalities elsewhere. Perhaps the voluntary opportunity of neighbourhood planning will be taken up only by a small number of areas (like other experiments in the past, such as Simplified Planning Zones). Above all, a collision with the decisions of LPAs and LEPs may multiply the existing problems of negotiating different scales of decision-making over what is likely to be a two-year period of difficult adjustment.

Removing ‘Top-Down’ Targets and Incentivizing Growth

The paper will resume the question of strategic inter-relationships between LPA areas in the next section, but it must first address the LPA-level of responsibility in development. Alongside revoking RSSs and curtailing the development of integrated RSs, the Coalition Government promoted the cutting of red-tape and ‘unnecessary’ targets. As the statutory planning system came under Coalition criticism, the emphasis lay towards a more permissive incentivized regime guided by a presumption in favour of (sustainable) development.

How will LPAs carry the onus of responding to incentives to provide housing? Although the demand for an incentive was sometimes seen as an excuse made to escape the needs identified in RSSs, and much planning opinion held the view that an open agenda would be captured by NIMBYs and unrepresentative groups, the government is adopting the use of financial incentives in an attempt to ‘enable’ development. There is support in wider circles for providing Local Authorities with this incentive to receive new housing, although the CLG HOC Committee (2011) established that no forecasts had been made of the number of dwellings this would generate. The New Homes Bonus (NHB) is providing a sum of

£432m in its second year of operation, 2012–2013. It is argued that the availability of these sums, while unlikely to overcome all opposition to housebuilding, will at least enable elected Leaders to *sell* the benefits of growth. But by doing so, it will also ‘monetize’ planning, not least because the HOC, in a controversial and muchdebated vote decided to allow the NHB and availability of finance in general as ‘material factors’ in the consideration of applications for development. There remain some other requirements for local authorities to prove they are providing five years’ worth of supply of housing land. However, whether the new incentive will be more effective than RSS targets is an open question.

It was clear by the turn of 2011 that there were doubts in the development industry and the professions about the interface between the localist rescaling of planning and economic development. Business held fears that their previous concern over securing permissions from LPAs would be accentuated by the unleashing of NIMBYism in the Localism Act. These were countered in the *Budget 2011* (HM Treasury, 2011) by a controversial emphasis on the presumption in favour of sustainable development that places a premium on market demand, by the extension of business-led NDPs, and by the revival of the ‘Enterprise Zone’ policy of the 1980s and 1990s Conservative Governments, that simplified planning control and reduced local taxes. The identification of Enterprise Zones became the first concrete task of LEPs.

Rescaling: From Nine Regions to 39 LEPs

This section considers what is, arguably, the most central aspect of the Coalition Government’s rescaling strategy; the dismantling of the regional (strategic) scale of policy-governance. This is quite a remarkable reworking considering the history examined earlier, although not without precedent. What is the intended role and scope of LEPs? The term ‘enterprise’ features prominently in their name, as it does across much of the Coalition’s policy discourse on the spatial organization of development (see, for example, HM Government, 2010b). As the planning system came under attack in 2011 from an array of government cabinet members, including the Prime Minister, who described professional planners as ‘enemies of enterprise’,

LEPs were put forward as the solution for enabling enterprise. How the ‘local’ interests involved in these partnerships, analyzed below, are intended to remove barriers to growth as a means of enabling a surge in enterprise was initially unspecified. Even following the (delayed) publication of the *Local growth* White Paper after the initial LEP submissions (HM Government, 2010b), the actual role and scope of LEPs remained ambiguous (Shutt *et al.*, 2012). See [Table 1](#) for an overview of the primary role(s) of LEPs in relation to national responsibilities.

How were the territorial configurations of LEPs to be defined, and are they entirely new in scale? Expected by government to have a geographic reach of a minimum of two or more upper-tier authorities, though some exceptions emerged, LEPs occupy a space *somewhere* between the local and the national level. Producing new sub-national governance spaces, often termed ‘sub-regional’, is perhaps reflective of more bottom-up pressures for rescaling. The notion of LEPs, with territories reflecting ‘functional’ or ‘natural’ economic areas, was specified (Cable & Pickles, 2010; Pickles & Cable, 2010; HM Government, 2010b). By identifying regions as remote, unaccountable and artificial administrative constructs, LEPs were positioned as entities better suited to the ‘local’ needs and business requirements of contemporary society. There is, however, a strong thread of continuity in that the majority of LEPs were the same as *previous* uppertier local authorities as defined in the reorganization of 1974 (Townsend, 2012), that already several sub-regions had both volunteered multi-area agreements (MAAs) and in some cases attained city-region status (Liddle, 2012), and that these areas have been accepted among the least contentious of the 62 original LEP proposals (Pugalis, 2011a). This is particularly the case with two statutory cityregions of Leeds and Manchester, which are larger than the smaller EU administrative regions in working population, and enjoy functional integrity and economies of scale.

What roles are different LEP board members expected to perform? There is an expectation from government that LEPs are private sector-led, demonstrate firm local (political) support and deliver ‘added value’. All the 39 approved LEPs have private-sector leadership in the shape of a chair from the business community, whilst many Local Authority leaders are not members of LEP boards. ‘Other’ societal actors, particularly those with voluntary and community sector experience, have featured less prominently in board selection processes (Pugalis, 2012). The role and scope of many

LEPs are anticipated to stretch beyond the traditional boundaries of local economic development practice, and some LEP leadership

TABLE 1. The primary role(s) of LEPs in relation to national responsibilities

Policy area	Possible role(s) of LEPs	Central government responsibilities
Planning	Informal co-ordination role	National policy in the form of a National Planning Policy Framework
Non-statutory strategy development, advisory or consultee functions	Determination of infrastructure and planning decisions of national importance	
Potential to take on statutory planning functions, including determination of applications for strategic development and infrastructure		
Infrastructure	Strategy formulation and engagement with local transport authorities on their local transport plans	Digital connectivity led by Broadband Delivery UK
Cross-boundary co-ordination of bids to the Local Sustainable Transport Fund		
Support the delivery of national initiatives, including the Growing Places Fund		

Policy area	Possible role(s) of LEPs	Central government responsibilities
Business and enterprise	Brokerage and advocacy	National website and call centre
Enterprise Zone site selection, proposals to government, and programme management		
Direct delivery support and grants will be subject to local funding		
Innovation	Advocacy role	Delivered through the Technology Strategy Board and an 'elite network' of Technology and Innovation Centres
Sectors	Provide information on local niche sectors	Leadership on sectors of national importance and the development of low carbon supply chain opportunities
		Support national Manufacturing Advisory Service
Inward investment	Provide information on local offer	Led by UKTI
Work with UKTI and local authorities		
Employment and skills	Advocacy role in terms of skills development	Led by Skills Funding Agency
	Work with providers to influence the delivery	Led by DWP and Jobcentre Plus

Policy area	Possible role(s) of LEPs	Central government responsibilities
of Work Programme at local level		

boards may therefore find themselves less equipped to make informed decisions about broader issues affecting the spatial pattern of development.

Filling the ‘Gaping Hole’ Left for (Sub-regional) Strategic Planning

Whilst the suggestion is not that the sub-region is *the optimum* scale of working, the sub-regional dimension does benefit from an ability to address *questions of coordinated restraint* across (Local Authority) administrative boundaries. Can LEPs help plug the ‘gaping hole’ left for (sub-regional) strategic planning? It is suggested that, in the absence of a politically palatable regional policy-governance framework of a statutory nature, LEPs present a viable space for the meaningful consideration of strategic matters, including planning. Indeed, the Coalition’s policy stance leaves little space for any alternative approaches, although this is not to suggest that hegemonic systems should go unchallenged. LEPs, viewed as the only available policy solution over the short-term, may provide (sub-regional) fora in which many if not ‘all’ aspects of the future spatial organization of development can be considered in a more integrated manner. LEPs may therefore be of value to planning, just as the reverse is the case; it is necessary at all stages of LEP business that planning is part of their activities, for instance in viewing the transport needs of business.

What forms of strategic planning may LEPs perform and are statutory strategyssetting powers necessary? During the crafting and development of LEP bids, explicit requests for statutory planning powers were rare. More often, proposals outlined prospective ‘planning’ roles (as they did other priorities and activities) in an extremely loose sense. Given the compressed submission timeframe and lack of guidance, this may have been a

purposeful tactic to allow future flexibility (Pugalis, 2011a). Whilst locally specific, LEPs are considering three broad forms of planning: strategy development, advisory or consultee functions, and the lobbying role. Among these, looser arrangements alone may not be sufficient to fill the 'gaping hole' between the upper-tier LPAs and Whitehall. In this respect, statutory planning powers would be crucial. Without them there is an inherent danger that the strategic spatial leadership role of LEPs and much of their work could prove nugatory. For example, a LEP covering several LPAs could find each local planning committee approving 'rival' development schemes, despite previous strategic accords under the banner of the LEP. Such a scenario might promote excessive local competition and repeated planning clashes between local authorities participating in the same LEP. Irrespective of the 'duty to co-operate' included in the Localism Act, a duty which is vague and may not be enforceable, councillors are not elected to co-operate across local authority boundaries. Without some legally binding plan for the larger-than-local LEP area, local planning decisions may be largely divorced from the priorities and activities of LEPs. Indeed, high-profile local planning decisions with significant crossboundary implications could seriously compromise the relationships developed under the banner of a LEP. In turn, this could render some LEPs little more than 'talking-shops' or 'toothless tigers' (HOC, 2010; Pugalis, 2011a). Such an outcome would support calls to grant LEPs statutory strategy-setting powers, despite the range of contradictory opinions expressed to the House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee consideration of LEPs (HOC, 2010). Nonetheless, the potential pitfalls that applied to the joint public-private sign-off of RSs by RDAs and Leaders' Boards remain (Counsell *et al.*, 2007; Marshall, 2008; Townsend, 2009), as the latest round of rescaling has done little to address England's larger-than-local democratic deficit.

The central dilemma over the use of LEPs was brought forward by the Department for Transport (2012). They are interested in larger-than-local geographies and governance arrangements for the purpose of rail franchising and the devolution of other transport schemes. LEP or even multi-LEP geographies, however, raise the dilemma of democratic accountability, which is also a prerequisite of decentralised transport functions. The same argument has risen to the fore over statutory planning. The role of planning in the spatial governance of LEPs is unlikely in any

case to be uniform and could be marginalized by some LEPs if they opt to concentrate on a narrow economic growth agenda, which could potentially militate against socio-environmental objectives and accelerate the ‘neoliberalization’ of spatial policy. However, Local Economic Assessments, intended to assess the ‘whole economy’ and thus incorporating a wider range of spatial development activities such as housing and transport, are likely to retain some importance and inform the work of LEPs. It remains less clear what role other spatial ‘evidence’, such as that compiled by LPAs and Parish Councils/Neighbourhood Forums, will perform in the formulation of LEP agendas. In the short term, it is anticipated that a formal planning role will remain on the margins of LEP agendas, just as it did during the submission exercise. Nevertheless, with budgets limited, ‘softer’ forms of planning may take on greater importance (Haughton & Allmendinger, 2007; Haughton *et al.*, 2009), viewed as an enabling tool to integrate visions, strategies and implementation. If momentum gathers, over the medium term the sub-regional scale could re-emerge, as a vehicle for strategic planning and collaboration beyond a narrow pursuit of economic growth.

Concluding Remarks on the State-Led Rescaling Strategy: Safeguards at the National Level?

On the surface, the UK Coalition Government’s twin-pronged rescaling strategy can be summarized as a gain in importance for the neighbourhood scale and a reduction for regions. In proposing new institutions that affect planning, the Coalition claimed the goal of restoring local economic growth and ‘rebalancing’ the economy. They set out to do this by *shifting power* to local communities and businesses; ‘ending the culture of Whitehall knows best’, in the words of Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg (HM Government, 2010b, p. 3). Nonetheless, the primary argument that has been made throughout this paper is that much of the Coalition’s re-working of scales of governance for the spatial organization of development is politically driven, and possibly impractical in terms of combining top-down policy and bottom-up community requirements.

The re-working of geographical scales and withdrawal of regional machinery do not leave the system entirely bereft of openings for strategic operations. Recognizing that no scale provides a magic bullet and that planning is tasked with arbitrating top-down and bottom-up considerations, the geography of LEPs could potentially perform a crucial role over future years: coordinating and influencing the spatial organization of development at the larger-than-local, subnational scale.

There is a question as to whether the two aspects of rescaling which have been discussed, the economic and the local, are compatible. In a later development in July 2011, the government issued (in draft form) a *National Planning Policy Framework* (CLG, 2011), which was published as formal government policy in March 2012. Reducing thousands of pages of policy into a single document of circa 50 pages of generic policy immediately dashes professional aspirations for a national ‘spatial’ plan for England, or for the provision of sub-regional context for LEPs. More worryingly, in the words of Richard Summers, the then President of the Royal Town Planning Institute, ‘Economic growth is generally set to trump the aspirations of local communities expressed in local and neighbourhood plans... [the Framework] could direct local policies to be set aside to deliver the government’s growth agenda in response to market-led demands rather than to promote truly sustainable development’ (cited in Butler, 2011, unpaginated).

As the Framework’s presumption for sustainable developments applies to individual planning applications, it does not directly affect the rescaling of planmaking. Thus, the overall impression of the Coalition Government’s rescaling decisions remains that they were undertaking change in *reaction* to what had gone before under Labour, and in reaction against the inherited systems of bureaucraticprofessional elites. The path of change has been consistent with previous Conservative governments which repeatedly promoted more local forms of governance. This reflects the point that councillors of the Coalition Parties tend to represent smaller local authorities in the south of England. There was also continuity in scales of working between the Labour and Coalition Governments in recognition of sub-regions. The paper has demonstrated how the ‘abolition’ of the regional scale of work, as attempted by the Coalition, is a deeply political rescaling strategy. It is argued that the Coalition Government’s re-working of the geographical scales of policy-governance has more to do with the politics of

dwindling public resources and ideological viewpoints than it does with locating a more appropriate spatial scale for the leadership and operation of sub-national planning and development. The inclusive rhetoric of localism could well mask a socially divisive planning system that favours (economic) growth over all other considerations. Therefore, what is embraced as a permissive incentivized system of passing powers to communities may reap benefits for some groups, whereas other groups struggle to ‘help themselves’.

Prognosis

Many agree that effectively the ‘region’ is now dead (Shaw & Robinson, 2012). Certainly, the ‘region’ as an organizing principle for planning and economic development no longer features in the current English policy vocabulary. Consequently, the general assessment, at the time of writing is that:

- It is possible to govern the spatial organization of development of England without formal regions, but the survival and/or emergence of some alternative (i.e. sub-regional) cross-boundary bodies is crucial;
- It is desirable to provide more meaningful local community input than hitherto, if this is seen as a rebalancing of ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ activity as well as a rebalancing of socio-environmental and economic interests;
- Local rescaling requires adequate resourcing, including officer support, to withstand capture by particular interest groups and elite actors;
- An incentivized regime may not be enough to overcome NIMBYism and may be discriminatory in a socio-spatial sense;
- Strategic plans of a statutory form are necessary, which some geographies consistent with LEPs territories may be well-placed to develop, although this may take several years for government to recognize and may not necessarily progress in a uniform manner, raising fundamental spatial justice issues.

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Notes

1. The Coalition Government initially sanctioned 24 LEPs in October 2010. Following this, a further 15 LEPs had been approved prior to the end of 2011. The 39 agreed partnerships cover all but one District of England.
2. The Localism Act—announced as a Bill in December, 2010 and operational from April 2012—legislates for the devolution of statutory powers, including the provision of local authority services at large, to a plethora of local bodies, including community groupings.
3. Policy-relevant implications draw on the authors' many years combined experience across a wide range of multi-scalar and multi-sector partnership forums, community regeneration boards, planning committees, Local Authorities, RDAs, GORs and national government departments, such as the former Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM).

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The Remodeling of Decision Making on Major Infrastructure in Britain

TIM MARSHALL

Tim Marshall, Department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University, UK.

Abstract

The UK government passed the 2008 Planning Act in order to reform the process for decisions on major infrastructure projects. Previously, this had been dealt with under the main town and country planning system, with the use of public inquiries, alongside sectoral consenting procedures. Here, the reasons for this legislation are explored, including revisions made by the Localism Act 2011, embedding this within an understanding of the broadly business friendly drives of all UK governments in recent years. Detailed assessment is made of the two main instruments used in England: national policy statements (NPSs) and the Infrastructure Planning Commission/National Infrastructure Directorate. This suggests that detailed implementation has generated certain contradictory or unexpected effects. A comparison is made with a very different approach in Scotland. An assessment is made of the significance of the law, given the political economic realities in which the new system's early life will be evolving.

Introduction

Planning has many facets, and different parts come to the fore in different periods and with varying effects. Infrastructure is often discussed but mostly concerning how the basic elements of urbanization are planned and funded, such as roads and community facilities (Morphet, 2009; Allmendinger, 2011). However, during the 2000s in the UK there has also been extensive debate about the provision of major network infrastructure including new highways, airports, and power stations. This paper addresses central questions within that debate. What are the challenges to which the major infrastructure field is responding? What lies behind efforts to reform major infrastructure in the UK? What has been the significance of these reforms? The answers must be provisional given the evolving implementation of the reforms. Doubtless, a more well-founded interpretation will emerge as the consequences of reform become clearer. In the meantime, this account provides a first review for students and policy makers.

The article is structured in three parts, addressing the three central questions, followed by a concluding section. First, the paper considers the nature of infrastructure challenges for policy, including an analysis of why major infrastructure has become a political issue, both globally and in a specific form in Britain. Second, the paper gives an account of reform since the 1990s in England and Scotland, illustrating the divergent approaches in the UK.¹ The paper explains the new legislation of 2006–2008 and what has happened subsequently, particularly the further changes made by the 2010 Coalition government. Third, an assessment is given of the significance of the 2008 reforms and the plausible policy trajectories for the coming years in this field. A concluding section reflects briefly on the UK experience in comparative European perspective.²

This article stems from a larger project comparing approaches to planning national infrastructure in four European states (France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain), as well as the UK. Each country study included interviews with the main spatial planning actors in ministries, as well as officials and other actors in each infrastructure sector. This complemented extensive study of documentation for each case. The UK case work concentrated on a long-run history of planning for infrastructure sectors since the 1940s, and on a history of the making of the 2008 Planning Act. The first was desk-based study of available documentation, alongside secondary histories. The second was based on a mix of interviews and study of documents. In addition, a more limited study of Scottish planning reform

since 2000 was undertaken, with interviews in Scotland in August 2010. In total, this formed seven modules of work, all of which are available in the form of working papers on the project webpages, given at the end of this paper. These detail sources—interviews and documentation.

The Nature of Infrastructure and Infrastructure Challenges

Major infrastructure has several features which make it problematic, and which have contributed to its salience for UK governments in recent years. Two are critical.

- Infrastructure is heavily contested. Projects can take up lots of land, whether in one place or in a line, and can have big impacts, of noise or other effects. They are often in ‘undeveloped’ land, in countryside, usually fiercely protected in Britain. They concern projects seen as vitally important by some business interests, and sometimes by wider societal interests. But they often run along the deep fault lines dividing society for the last half century or more, around the best paths for overall development, greener or less green, growing more or less. Consensus are, therefore, generally hard to find. This may well apply especially in Britain, which has a more constrained geography than many European states, with higher population density than most, and which has been marked in the last 40 years by great conflict around fundamental political and economic approaches.
- All societies have to address the challenges of producing major infrastructure, which has particular features. Very long pay back periods, next to very large initial outlays, make investment in large infrastructure risky, in most cases. Different modes and different countries in different periods have met these challenges in a variety of ways. Both state-led and private-led modes have been common in the early stages of industrialization across the world. The old arguments around natural monopoly and other factors (Marshall, 1920) provided the theoretical foundation for state action for a century, and no new language has really emerged to capture contemporary mixed realities,

beyond the privatizing rhetoric of neoliberal economics (O'Neill, 2010). The high risks of investment were the reason why state intervention, in a multiplicity of forms, was so common through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in so many countries. The turn of neoliberalizing capitalism to more private-based provision, since the 1980s, has presented these challenges in new forms, especially in relation to the carrying of risk. The 1997–2010, Labor governments were caught in this whirlpool of long-term economic realities and the post-1980s challenges in political economy and environmental sustainability. These two challenges are now analyzed.

The Economic Challenges of Infrastructure

National competitiveness is at the core of the 'infrastructuralism' which has risen inexorably since around 1990. Whilst the concept and its working out may be problematic, political scientists do see various shapes of competition state in action, working at every level from city governance to the EU (Jessop, 2002; Cerny, 2006). Essentially, capitalist accumulation is seen to depend on infrastructural foundations, whether this is expressed in Marxist (Harvey, 1982; Gough, 1996), or varying conventional economic forms (Kessides, 1993; World Bank, 1994). Of course, these theoretical formulations have very different implications, too many to go into here. But all highlight infrastructure as implicated importantly in the working of contemporary economies. Whilst the exact importance of having this or that sort of energy system or one or other degree of 'efficiently functioning' transport systems may be very hard to pin down in any objective social scientific terms, the typical policy and business elites do appear to believe in this equation: good local/regional/national/continental infrastructure is needed for economic success. This has been expressed consistently in Britain by the Confederation of British Industry since the 1990s (e.g. Confederation of British Industry, 1992, 1995, 2000), as it has been by bodies like the Institution of Civil Engineers in its State of the Nation reports (e.g. Institution of Civil Engineers, 2009), or by government bodies like the Council for Science and Technology (2009).

Infrastructuralism is global, or at least very common around much of the richer developed world (OECD, 2011). Bodies like Infrastructure Australia (set up 2008), Infrastructure Canada (from 2002), the National Infrastructure

Unit in New Zealand (2010), the Infrastructure Investment Forum in Ireland, and the efforts of the Obama administration to pump prime the US economy by massive infrastructure investments, all show the interest in this dimension of economies. The European Union had made its own push in this area under the Trans European Networks programme begun in the early 1990s as a spin off from the single market project, and continued through to the present. In the UK, the discourse became visible in Treasury documents especially since the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review work (HM Treasury, 2006).

The rhetoric of enormous importance given to energy and transport systems, including the wearing out of such systems through lack of maintenance and investment, is a constant theme. For most developed countries, OECD data do show a declining investment in infrastructure as a proportion of GDP, typically falling from 6 or 7% to 3 or 4% (OECD STAN database). However, [Figure 1](#)

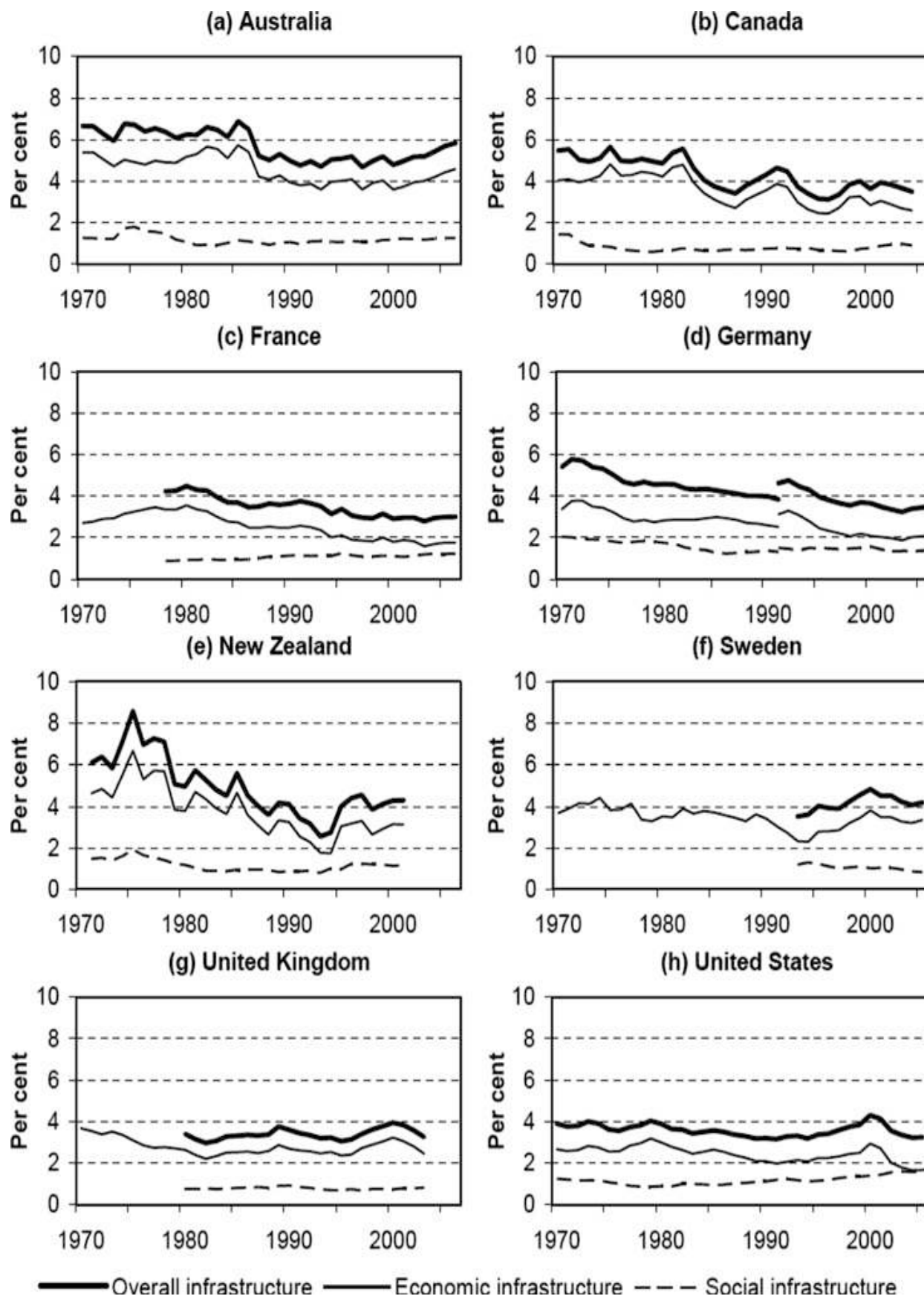


FIGURE 1. Overall investment in economic and social infrastructure 1970–2006. (*Source: Chan et al., 2009, Public Infrastructure Financing: An International Perspective, Staff working paper, Productivity Commission, Australian National Government*).

suggests several European countries have been converging at only 2% or a bit more for economic infrastructure since the 1980s—UK, France, and Germany. Some interests seek to present an unusually underperforming UK to justify the need for new investment, but the reality is more mixed. And, of course, such broad brush measures could not in any case be used to ‘prove’ that more infrastructure of one kind or another is needed. Demand management has been argued for as a prime solution in all sectors for many years. In some European countries (France, Germany, Netherlands, to varying degrees in different periods, but all quite strongly in the 2000s) this is now at the heart of much state policy, even if real implementation of efficiency and conservation rhetoric is always harder.

As most infrastructure investment in the UK, outside road and rail, has been privately funded since the 1990s, this must somehow be made profitable. In the UK, this has meant extremely elaborate regulatory systems, in order to try to facilitate investment as well as hit other social and environmental targets. Only in parts of some industries (telecommunications, airports, and water) has investment been relatively high, with much sweating of assets being the norm elsewhere (Helm, 2004, 2007). The wider regulation has been essential in all cases to enable what investment has taken place, as industries have been successively moved into more and more demanding asset classes, now in many cases parts of global private equity companies (Whitfield, 2010, 2012). This means that the main challenge to British governments is to secure investment at all in these industries, with finance not planning as the core issue. Often this is done by straight state investment, as in roads or rail, but in the stretched conditions of public finance since 2008, it is not certain that this solution will be continued. So although this article is naturally about the planning dimension of major infrastructure, it is the wider picture or context which will have the biggest impact on any actions over the next decade or more.

There is an argument that neoliberal capitalism has been busy inventing an efficient manner to deal with big infrastructure, what might be called the Macquarie model, after the Australian investment bank which pioneered the global infrastructure funds (O’Neill, 2009). These began to buy up assets such as toll roads, ports, airports. Although in one sense a subset of all public

private partnerships (PPP) work, this is a particular form and is hardly more than 10 years old, and so it is too early to be sure whether it might indeed provide a durable solution to infrastructure financing. At any rate, the traction of the model in the UK and most of Europe remains slight, compared with other regions, and so the immediate effect on state policy making remains limited.

The Sustainability Challenges of Infrastructure

The sustainability nexus presents most sharply in recent years as the climate change and low carbon problematic. This was visible in Britain since about 1990, but took a step up the political agenda with the Stern (2006) report. Now all discussion of new infrastructure is framed partly in these terms, with some sort of apparent cross (major) party consensus on this as also on the competitiveness challenge. All infrastructure systems are seen as in need of reform, so that they are massively less carbon intensive by some future date (usually somewhere in mid century, sometimes, more seriously, by say 2020). Different interpretations argue over whether this may need lots of new infrastructure, raising major planning questions (power stations, tidal barrages, high speed rail lines), or simply varying new management of existing systems, with far less planning implications. But the balance of opinion over the last five years or more has probably been that major new investment in new places will be needed, and this has fuelled the interest in infrastructure planning.

Although the combined view on economic and environmental challenges may be shared in some form by the three major cross-UK parties, they are not hegemonic or uncontested. There are significant voices which are uncertain about the need for meeting either challenge by infrastructure investment. This may be because of a commitment to managing demand for energy and mobility, and may also be related to a questioning of economic growth as the motor of capitalist societies (O'Connor, 1994, Jackson, 2009). From a market led perspective, there are those who doubt the need for state intervention (Harrison, 2006). It is important to bear in mind that infrastructuralism ('more infrastructure is needed') is an argument, not a 'fact', however much the powers that be may wish the challenges to appear so. This affects profoundly the role of planning within this problematic.

Analysing the History of Infrastructure Planning

Whilst ‘minor’ infrastructure was widely held to be a gap in effective planning’s armory, this was not so with major infrastructure. Existing machinery had guided decision making through the previous decades, seeing major investment in several sectors. Naturally, the issues were contested, but only on the rarest occasions did that lead to major decision making paralysis or really problematic delays. The rise of the infrastructure agenda, therefore, needs to be understood politically, rather than via an explanation focused on ‘inside’ planning. How this actually works out should become clear in the following account of the UK cases.

This is not to deny the difficulties of infrastructure planning, the hard task planners and governments face in these decisions. Clearly, the balance of what is needed where is contested. Even if a lobby or interest group accepted the need for say wind energy expansion, they might oppose it in particular cases, as has tended to be the case with nature protection groups like the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England or the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. A consensus that a high speed north-south rail route may be desirable in England may not extend to support for finding an exact route. The normal balancing task of spatial planning can be at its sharpest here, as big economic and political interests are at stake. So in theorizing the planning of major infrastructure, the main need is to be fully cognizant of the wider theorizing of the infrastructure realities themselves. In explaining what happened in the UK 2006–2010, a wide angle view, relating the reform to current neoliberal ideology, is relevant, as will become clear in the following account. Ideas have been critically important, some from the professional sphere, some from political thinking. These have combined with particular contingent policy developments. These have included the conversion of the government to nuclear power in 2006, which raised sharply the question of how to avoid discussion of the principle of nuclear power emerging at each public inquiry.

The History of Infrastructure Reforms in Britain 1990–2010

During the period of strong state intervention, which began essentially in the First World War in Britain, the infrastructure industries were privileged in

planning terms, and only gradually from the 1960s did difficulties begin to emerge in planning major projects (the detail throughout this history is taken from Marshall, 2010a). This did not lead to very pressing calls for planning reform, with a general assumption that the normal system of public inquiries was there to deal with the struggles over both principles and sitting, whatever the outcome in one case or another. Some planning experts did argue for some better national framing of major infrastructure in the 1980s (Nuffield Foundation, 1986; Bruton and Nicholson, 1987) and this formed a minor key of planning debate through to the 2000s political reforms arguments.

It is then important to understand the process of reform since 1997, as this allows us to see the dynamic in which the current regime is now situated. The policy development was naturally specific to the 1997–2010 Labor governments, but this coincides largely with wider drives common to the previous Conservative governments and the current Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition—in this field, far less elsewhere in planning. From their first weeks, the Blair governments were concerned about the time taken in deciding on major infrastructure: in May 1997, Blair asked the planning minister to examine how the situation could be improved. The pressure of the business lobby was thus already apparent, although during the first term of government no practical action resulted in this area (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1999). This changed in 2001, when a reform was proposed to the procedures for deciding on major projects, with a scheme to get decision in Parliament (Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions, 2001). This was attacked by a range of interests, environmental, legal, and parliamentary and was dropped from the wider planning reform package (House of Commons, 2002; ODPM, 2002). No coherent story line had been created by that stage, with only a push from the prime minister, and limited support around the government. It is true that planning bodies did not really mobilize against this or the 2007 initiative, with the Royal Town Planning Institute being broadly supportive, perhaps seeing this as a move towards its hoped for national planning framework (RTPI, 2006). But wider planning skepticism was considerable.

However, the New Labor agenda, increasingly driven from the Treasury, had now a fixed idea that major infrastructure reform was needed. Two major inquiries in 2005–2006, led by Kate Barker (previously of the CBI) and Rod Eddington (previously head of British Airways) concluded from

planning and transport perspectives that a reform was now possible, by setting up an ‘independent’ planning body to make decisions, beyond the immediate political sphere (Barker, 2006; Eddington, 2006). Equally importantly, the energy review of the same year decided that nuclear power stations were needed to fill the prospective energy gap, and that planning reform was critical to this as well as to other progress on renewable energy (Department of Trade and Industry, 2007; Kelly, 2008). In this way, the three key departments (business, finance, and transport) were lined up for a planning reform, and the matter was taken out of the hands of the department in which planning sat (still unconvinced of the need for a root and branch reform, having successfully promoted other approaches since 2001), and worked up in the Cabinet Office.

Quickly, the practical details emerged in a planning White Paper (HM Government, 2007) and the nature of the reform was fixed. Opposition to the bill was significant in the environmental movement, but limited elsewhere, and the government was able to push through the White Paper proposals more or less intact (Newman, 2009). The Act had two components (see [Table 1](#)). One was the making of national policy statements (NPSs) for all the key infrastructure sectors. It was decided there would be 12 of these, and that these would be worked up by the relevant sectoral ministries for energy, transport, and environment. These would then be the main consideration for decision making by the second component, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC). A significant feature of this late period legislation is that it had to be rather rushed, to reach even the point of near implementation by May 2010. This meant that some leeway existed for the incoming government to alter the reforms. Significantly, they have not, overall, taken advantage of this leeway, beyond the long committed return of final decisions to the relevant ministers.

National Policy Statements

Since the 1980s planning commentators had discussed the merits of either a national planning framework of some kind or of strategies for particular sectors (airports, etc.). The former was resisted throughout, but the latter was pursued, if fitfully, mainly by the tried and tested means of White Papers. The 1997–2010 governments were quite keen on this sectoralized approach, and after the collapse of the 2001 reform initiative in this area, planning

officials again advocated sectoral efforts. These did emerge in the 2003 aviation White Paper, and to a more limited extent in the roads, rail, and energy sectors, but were resisted completely on ports. By 2006, the lack of enthusiasm for such spatially attuned strategies was clear. Other White Papers in these years were all—UK documents, not giving spatial detail. The 2008 Act came back again to this element, to try to establish the national interest principles of developments and escape from the risk of long public inquiries debating such principles. The key decision was that the NPSs would be the preserve of sectoral departments, with the ministry including planning having very little role in their production, beyond sketching out a route map for their drafting, consultation, and completion (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009). This was doubtless inevitable in the eternal turf wars of Whitehall government, but meant that any principles of spatial coordination (or perhaps other sorts, financial for example) were largely lost. The contrast with the relative forcefulness of spatial planning in the UK devolved administrations in these years is sharp.

This form of implementation of the NPS principle has had important effects. There is a gradual retreat in the number of sectors to be covered, with no NPSs for

TABLE 1. The two main elements of the infrastructure planning system formed under the 2008 Planning Act and 2011 Localism Act (Author's own)

Element of 2008/2011 system	Function	Form of operation	Progress of implementation	Localism Act changes
National Policy Statements	To set main strategic guidelines to be taken into account by IPC/NID	Drawn up by sectoral ministry (energy, environment, or transport), debated by parliamentary select committee, and approved	6 Energy NPSs finally approved July 2011, and Ports NPS in January 2012. Waste Water NPS in final form February 2012 Hazardous Waste NPS in draft form July	Post 2010 government accepted most of the 2008 system, but Parliament can now approve all NPSs by votes

Element of 2008/2011 system	Function	Form of operation	Progress of implementation	Localism Act changes
		by government	2011. Last NPS, on National Networks (road and rail), expected 2012	
Infrastructure Planning Commission/ National Infrastructure Directorate	To take decisions (or for NID to give recommendations to ministers), once NPSs are approved, on all infrastructure projects above certain thresholds. Time limits for decisions apply, normally no more than nine months from the start of the examination of schemes	Project applicants have to conduct one round of consultation, and the IPC/NID a second, prior to (if necessary) hearings. IPC/NID consultation phase includes the submission of local impact reports by local authorities Decisions are by panels or single examining inspectors	Chair, two deputy chairs and 33 examining inspectors. Co-located with Planning Inspectorate in Bristol. First formal application submitted in August 2010, but only nine applications by March 2012	IPC abolished in April 2012 and incorporated in Planning Inspectorate as National Infrastructure Directorate. Final decisions now again made by minister

Element of 2008/2011 system	Function	Form of operation	Progress of implementation	Localism Act changes
		depending on nature of project		

airports and water now proposed (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2010). The drafts of the energy and ports NPSs issued in November 2009 indicated that their guidance was intended to be noted not only by the IPC, but also by local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate for cases falling below IPC thresholds, and where relevant by the Marine Management Organization. The UK had gone within a year or two from having one spatial planning regime (that of the Town and Country Planning Acts) to three, with the marine and IPC regimes added. This surely leaves scope for uncertainty over coming years, as the validity of NPSs and any other national planning frameworks is argued out. Effectively sectoral ministries have become sort of spatial planning agencies, without the ministry containing planning able to give a strong steer on the evolution of these regimes. How this works out will affect the evolution of the 2008 Act, whichever governments are in power. These are unexpected consequences, not worked through by the Barker and Eddington processes which gave birth to the Act.

Another critical feature of the NPS process as it is evolving is how unspecialized the documents are. The only ones that identify sites are those for nuclear power, and, in much lower key mode, for wastewater. None of the others discuss even general locations, and that for ports argues explicitly against such an approach. It is unlikely that the National Networks (road and rail) NPS will be despatialized in this way, but this was repeatedly delayed, and not available at the time of writing. That NPS raises most dramatically the difficult spatial issues which governments generally wish to avoid in the UK (at least in England), and it remains to be seen whether it will be much more than a shopping list of road and rail schemes, hardly integrated with other transport sectors or wider policy goals. The National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2012) was also completely spatially non-committal, despite early suggestions that

some sort of national spatial framework might be forthcoming. All these policy approaches seek to hide implicit spatial and regional decision making.

One more vital feature was raised by critics of the energy NPSs in the consideration in the parliamentary select committee (House of Commons, 2010). This was that there was no way of judging how far proposals coming forward would relate to the government objectives under the 2009 Climate Change Act. The energy NPSs encourage the development of generation by most fuels, without prioritizing, meaning that the IPC cannot use the low carbon issue in its deliberations. There could be a burst of gas power stations for example, removing the need for low carbon investment, as in the 1990s. This is another destabilizing issue which will affect the working out of this institutional innovation, unless the present government simply removes the climate change goals, not at present a likely prospect.

Together these features mean that the NPSs will move in a contested and possibly contradictory force field over the coming years. Whilst they may in some cases give the much longed for national certainty on principle and so give a firm basis for decisions, it is equally likely that they will be caught up in complex and sometimes politically difficult tensions. That does not necessarily mean that their invention was unwise, but that they may not provide the solution that drafters of the 2008 Act hoped for.

The Infrastructure Planning Commission

The IPC was contested from the start by environmental interests and by some wider viewpoints who distrusted the idea of ‘independent’ expert decision makers dealing with such important matters. This was picked up by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties in opposition, and IPC abolition was lodged in their manifestos. The original idea had been that the IPC members would be chosen for their impartial expertise, and they alone would make rapid decisions on all projects over a certain size. This was accompanied by an extensive reform of the consenting procedures, so that for large schemes most consents will be granted in one go, rather than separately under varying energy and transport acts. The outcome after the 2010 election was that the IPC was abolished under the Localism Act 2011, but its functions were transferred to a National Infrastructure Directorate (NID) within the Planning Inspectorate. The simplified consents regime, the (supposedly) faster decision-making process and all other elements of the

2008 Act remain. The key difference is that the NID will make recommendations to ministers who will make the final decisions. This evidently restores legitimacy, but will bring back political difficulties on matters such as nuclear power in exactly the way the inventors of the regime were trying to avoid. It may well extend the decision-making time, though ministers have promised to take no more than three months from the time of receiving NID recommendations.

One feature which has raised the worries of businesses is the procedure for very extensive pre-submission consultation by developers. In large schemes like the Hinkley Point nuclear power station this extended to more than two years work, with several rounds of local consultation. This may well mean that, whilst the final decision stage is indeed faster, the overall time scales will be not so dissimilar to those under the previous regime.

This episode may be seen as highlighting fault lines in this aspect of the neoliberal project. The IPC is a child of the idea that politics cannot be trusted to decide in many difficult areas—the 1997 handing over of interest rate decisions to the Monetary Policy Committee was a sign of New Labor's support for this sort of thinking (Hay, 2007). In the Barker and Eddington reports, the insistence on the need for an 'independent' system of planning decision making explicitly connected to the Monetary Policy Committee experience, even though the two fields are hardly comparable in importance. The major Treasury input to both reports makes this connection unsurprising. It is a little ironic that the most strongly neoliberalized parties in the UK are (in this one small policy area) going against this line of thinking, which spawned numerous policy initiatives under Conservative governments in the 1980s. In this case, my judgment is that the play of interest and party politics and ideology over the last 5 years may well have invented a mechanism which will appeal to other governments trying to speed up decision making on difficult projects. This is not such a priority across Europe as it has been in the UK government in recent years, but business lobbies do make the same point in many countries (the Business Europe webpages contained prominent calls for consent speed up in 2009–2010). The European Commission has been investigating how consenting may be improved for infrastructure projects since 2008. Proposals remain modest at the time of writing. The attractiveness of anything like the 2008 Act model depends on the evolution of that model in its early years. Large scale opposition, and accompanying processes of delegitimation, would not

encourage imitation in other European countries, or the making of an EU guideline promoting common practice.

Other interesting features of the IPC experience cannot be picked up here. Their commitment to transparency, for example, has been striking (with all correspondence published immediately), and not necessarily to the liking of some businesses. National Infrastructure Directorate (NID) practice might in future find the need to use the sort of policy dialogue forms now the norm under the Commission Nationale du Debat Public (CNDP), which considers all major projects in France well in advance of any public consenting decisions (see CNDP webpages and Subra, 2008). The law of unexpected consequences may hover over this governance innovation—the story is by no means at an end.

Scotland—Another Path

This paper is primarily about England, but it is important to remember that one other highly distinctive approach has been evolved over the same years, in Scotland (that in Wales is also of interest, but Wales's lesser devolved powers have held back its options in this area). This is marked above all by the making of a National Planning Framework (NPF), first in non-statutory form in 2004, then as part of a reformed overall planning system under the 2006 Act, with NPF2 finalized in 2009 (for detail see Marshall, 2010b, key references include Purves, 2006; Lloyd and Purves, 2009). This is intensely infrastructural, with both editions full of discussion of transport issues, and the second one leading on energy developments. What is more, it was decided to incorporate in NPF2 a list of national developments, which were held to be linked to the overall national spatial strategy (see [Figure 2](#)). For these developments, as for those shown in the UK NPSs, the principle of development was seen as having been established by NPF2, which had been debated in parliamentary committees, though not approved by parliament (like most national strategies it is approved by the cabinet).

The Scottish approach stemmed from some of the same concern with problematic decision making as in the Planning Act 2008, in this case particularly difficulties with the completion of the M74 Extension in the early 2000s. But it was tackled in a much more planning friendly culture,

which appears to be quite easy with broad spatial strategies. By combining these major projects with a spatial strategy, the Scottish system takes a quite different path, with the NPF representing the whole bundle of NPSs, and the in principle support then leaving decisions with the normal planning machinery, with no hint of an IPC type body. The approach is supplemented by an active strategic approach to projects, with central ministries working intensively on for example wind farm issues with local authorities. Other elements include a more strategic use of Strategic Environmental Assessment, with an SEA unit established in-house within the government.

This is not to say that the Scottish approach can be held up as necessarily a success story or certainly not yet. Environmental interests remain very unconvinced in some cases, with a campaign against one national project at Hunterston for a coal power station continuing very much alive, after the local authority refused the planning application late in 2011. There have also been doubts about the need for the second Forth crossing road bridge. However, most of the 14 national developments appear to be less controversial. The NPF system and particularly this element of linking it to big projects is still evolving. It remains to be seen whether this particular solution stays as a central element in NPF3.

MAP 10

NATIONAL DESIGNATIONS

National Developments

- ① Replacement Forth crossing
- ② Improved Rail Connectivity in the West of Scotland
- ③ Strategic Airport Enhancements
- ④ Grangemouth Freight Hub
- ⑤ Rosyth International Container Terminal
- ⑥ New Port on Loch Ryan
- ⑦ Scapa Flow Container Transshipment Facility
- ⑧ New Power Station and Transshipment Hub at Hunterston
- ⑨ New Non-Nuclear Baseload Capacity at Other Existing Power Station Sites
- ⑩ Electricity Grid Reinforcements
- ⑪ Metropolitan Glasgow Strategic Drainage Scheme
- ⑫ Commonwealth Games Facilities and Infrastructure

⊙ World Heritage Site

■ Natural Heritage Designation

□ National Park



FIGURE 2. National designations in National Planning Framework 2, 2009 (Scottish Government, National Planning Framework 2). The arrows refer to electricity transmission line requirements, the numbers to individual projects.

My own judgment is that this way of linking projects may not be fully effective. NPF2 presents the 14 projects as if they follow from certain criteria and are fully justified by the overall spatial strategy. However, this is not altogether convincing, and it is clear that political choice is behind the project list—quite understandably. NPF2’s approach may be valuable as a first step, but I think there could be merit in the Dutch system. This, alongside the long-term national spatial strategy, identifies some big projects or issues as national key decisions (or strategic visions in the latest planning law), and these have their own-tailored machinery to guide their decisions and implementation (essentially this is Rotterdam port and Schiphol airport, plus some sectoral strategies which are labeled as spatially strategic). This preserves their status as national projects, but gives more room for consideration and legitimacy.

At any rate, the over-riding decision in Scotland, common to NPF1 and 2, to include infrastructure planning within a national planning framework, appears to have great merit, and may well offer a contrast to the difficulties around NPSs in the coming years in England. The consensus across the three major parties in Scotland is quite different from that of the (different) three major parties in England. Infrastructure and spatial planning are as ever caught up in contrasting state projects. The Scottish Nationalist Party in particular takes a special interest in energy infrastructure, relevant to its vision of an independent Scotland, and it is here that the biggest differences may be played out over the next decade or more. A government can hardly have a bigger state project than its own independence. And territory remains core to state form.

Much ado about not much? The Significance of the 2000s Reforms

Planning was caught up in strange political dynamics under the 1997–2010 governments. At first, it was to be ‘modernized’ like the rest of the state, in

fact only changed at the margins (Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1998). Subsequently, calls for more serious reforms gathered strength, and the two legislative results of this were the mainly plans (local and regional) reform of 2004 and the infrastructure set of 2008. In both cases, the drive had large ideological elements, which is not to say it was unimportant, but did mean that the motivation related to fights about the state project of New Labor, and its relationship with business, especially large businesses, rather than debates about the realities of planning. The latter were focused on more by planning officials, via regulatory, resource and administrative changes, to an extent by ‘culture change’, whilst the reform acts got caught up in issues about the underlying role of the state and of democracy.

All analysis of the major infrastructure field found that it was largely a camp of high politics. If the Heathrow Terminal 5 decision took many years, this was in part because this suited government ministers. Examination of cases lasting longer than a year showed these to be very few in the 1980s and 1990s, and the result normally of either political delaying or real complexities (large projects are genuinely complex in many cases, involving many powerful actors, large public and private finance, and so on—the planning stage is often the least of their complexity—see the excellent analysis of Levett, 2007a, 2007b). This was clear in the Modernizing Planning workstream of 1997–2000 and was confirmed in interview with a ministry official. Major infrastructure was far from being at the top of the departmental work agenda.

Given that these points remain valid, what are their implications for the playing out of the reforms and for the rest of this field? The major projects which precipitated the reform, for nuclear power stations, new runways and waste incinerators, will not stop being controversial. Their promoters will remain very cautious about bringing forward projects where they feel there are any sorts of the big risks in sight, only one of which is a possible planning refusal. Of course *that* risk is serious, and the new system may on occasions reduce the risk significantly, or at least get a quicker decision one way or another. But ministers will no more want unpopularity due to hard decisions in 2015 than in 1995 or 2005.

My comparative work has made clear that the concern in other European governments is not as intense as in Britain on decision delays. This is related to the generally lesser privatization and liberalization of infrastructure industries. But should the EU press on with these policy drives, which is

probable, such pressures may build up to early 2000s UK levels in due course. This raises the wider question of Europeanization. Will the current efforts to give the EU more strategic influence on networks for energy and transport have success? And if so, will they impact much on Britain, as against the continental core? It seems quite possible that marine planning in areas like the North Sea will be significantly affected by EU processes, and that in turn could have some influence on UK terrestrial planning. However, the overall impact of revised Trans-European Networks approaches may remain limited in Britain, as against their higher significance in Germany and surrounding areas, especially eastwards.

In environmental circles, the broad consensus on the path to a low carbon society is that this depends more on behavior and demand management changes than on major infrastructure development. Where major infrastructure is involved, the new system may ease development, which will generate support for the new regime in those quarters. This might work for renewables like wind farms, for new transmission lines, and perhaps for new rail lines. Therefore, the evolution of the new regime depends very much on the path taken politically by successive governments. If the priority really becomes a low carbon transition, then certain new geographies will be gradually seen as desirable, with a significant role for big (national and regional) planning. But planning will only be one, possibly small, part of the overall public package of governing instruments (see Rydin, 2010).

All this is crucially intertwined with the nature of the state project pursued in the UK, and particularly for England, given the divergence now quite visible in Scotland and Wales. All the signs are for a continuation of the neoliberal project of the 1990s and 2000s, but lacking the social and redistributive elements visible in various ways in those periods. Whether this is really tenable in a democracy remains to be seen, in that a scaling back of the state may be unpopular. Such scaling back would play across strongly to the field of infrastructure planning, in that much of this, from nuclear power to railways to wind farms, relies on implicit or explicit state support. In October 2010, the government published the first National Infrastructure Plan, stemming from the setting up of Infrastructure UK in 2009 (HM Treasury, 2010). This was a lightweight Plan, primarily committing to a number of important infrastructure projects, and referring across to proposed regulatory reviews. It was revised in 2011 (HM Treasury, 2011). The result was more substantial, and may well be a landmark in the way infrastructure will be managed at national level, with governments competing to present

the most investment friendly climate to global investors, by seeking to combine regulatory, financial and planning reforms. The more integrated approach which had emerged in the previous five years would clearly continue, but with very little spatial planning emphasis. Such an emphasis was seen as inimical to the sort of neoliberalized model espoused in the UK.

There is scope for evolution of the systems, in both England and Scotland. The NID might be impelled to seek fresh approaches, perhaps learning from French practice (several large applicants are French companies), and bringing to bear some of the developing work on mediation. The NPSs may evolve, with perhaps a need for full review after the first set are finished around 2013–2014, seeing how in particular relationships *between* statements can be improved, making linking up of the sectoral ministries and the planning ministry an issue. NPF3 in Scotland could vary both its core approach to its spatial strategy and the forms of linking to major national developments.

The significance of the reforms is likely to be considerable, showing a possible new model, developing in unexpected ways, especially when we consider nonplanning elements like the National Infrastructure Plan. Skepticism is nevertheless appropriate, as to whether the whole project will make a great difference in speed of decision making, or will facilitate very much the consent routes for developers. On both, time will tell.

The UK in Comparative Perspective

Comparative European analysis reveals the distinctiveness of the 2008 Act approach. The EU states studied (France, Germany, Netherlands, and Spain) have found very different ways to tackle what are broadly the same challenges. There are different ways to try to achieve national coordination. Formal national spatial strategies linked to many sectoral strategies (Netherlands, Scotland), sectoral strategies alongside loose spatial guidelines (Germany), certain strong national drives alongside complex and continuous interscalar political negotiation (France and Spain): these all work, after a fashion, and have advantages and disadvantages. The NPS route, now sitting alongside the National Infrastructure Plan, is an interesting variant, viewed from an academic distance. It is ‘planning lite’; in fact, most NPSs hardly

qualify as spatial planning. No other government has attempted such a neoliberalized reform path as that chosen by the UK governments.

Equally the projects side is dealt with variously, with the CNDP in France being perhaps the most striking innovation in recent years—this allows early and nonbinding deliberation on projects. A similar approach was advocated for the Severn tidal barrage project by the Sustainable Development Commission (2007). But other variants are of interest, especially in the federal and semi-federal systems, where the states tend to assess the big projects against their political priorities (in Germany through the long-established machinery of the Raumordnungsverfahren, or spatial planning procedure, in Spain more obviously politically). Again the IPC was on its own, and the regime looks less distinctive now it is reined back, but the simplifying and speed up reforms may well be of interest internationally.

How far though are these international variations ‘available’ to the particular UK state project, given core political economic preferences? I have pointed to some scope for policy drift within the detailing of the emerging regimes, but this is only likely to go a limited way, and can be ‘corrected’ to refit the main neoliberalizing drive, in part by associated policy instruments beyond planning like the National Infrastructure Plan. But those instruments themselves then might influence planning fields. This is because the challenges examined earlier are to some extent polyvalent, pushing in more than one direction. A government concerned about low carbon transitions might at times want to adjust the dominant drive to competitiveness, with all the implications this could have for infrastructure decisions.

It is important to study the planning dimension of this field, in part to highlight that there are definite alternative paths that could be taken. However, it is also important to see this within the big picture, which concerns basic government goals and the overall economic and regulatory circumstances of coming years. Planning may as usual be in the spotlight, but the most powerful issues will remain in the realm of corporations and their financing, and their relationships with the core of governments. Analysts should keep a focus on these real world powers, alongside the particular rationalities of planning arrangements. Theorizing of planning for major infrastructure should rest firmly within theorizing of infrastructure provision as a whole.

Notes

1. The 2008 Planning Act applies completely to England but less to the three devolved territories, with Scotland largely free of its provisions except on aviation and some energy issues, but Wales significantly more affected. Northern Ireland is not affected at all. I refer constantly here to the UK, as this is the state which made the changes, but do not deal with Northern Ireland or Wales substantively at all.
2. This work arises from a project funded by an ESRC fellowship on Infrastructure and Spatial Planning (grant number RES-063-27-0157). This has allowed me to examine practice in relation to planning big infrastructure in other EU states, as well as studying changes in England. Further details and far more detailed referencing, in the shape of working papers on Dutch, French, German, Scottish, and Spanish experience, as well as on England, can be found at the following webpages <http://www.brookes.ac.uk/schools/be/about/planning/projects/tmarshall.html>

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Neo-liberalization Processes and Spatial Planning in France, Germany, and the Netherlands: An Exploration

BAS WATERHOUT, FRANK OTHENGRAFEN &
OLIVIER SYKES

Bas Waterhout, Delft University of Technology, OTB Research Institute for the Built Environment, The Netherlands.

Abstract

'Is the English experience distinctive?' It is this question, asked by the guest editors of this Special Issue, that triggered this article focusing on the impact of neo-liberal ideologies on planning in Germany, France, and the Netherlands. The multi-faceted concept of neo-liberalism is used here as a perspective to interpret the recent developments in the three countries. Proposed changes to planning in England are also briefly considered. Although there are clear differences in the magnitude and actual manifestation of neo-liberalism in planning across the analyzed countries, with England clearly showing some of the more radical and disruptive effects, there seems to be a clear direction in which planning in North West Europe is heading. Due to processes of globalization, individualization, and Europeanization, questions also arise in each country regarding the position and objectives of planning. Neo-liberalization processes tend to further accentuate these questions as planning more often than not is grounded on a different set of principles. Yet, this does not necessarily completely dissociate planning from neo-liberalism. In particular, the

French and German experiences indicate that even in broadly 'neo-liberal times', there is still a demand for spatial planning.

Introduction

Neo-liberalism is a multi-faceted concept, one that has had many different manifestations and interpretations both over time and within different national and sub-national contexts. The influences of neo-liberalization on spatial planning are manifold. As outlined by the set of articles in this issue, this is clearly the case for English spatial planning. It is interesting to see how various episodes of neoliberalism, starting with the Thatcher government, have worked out differently for spatial planning. Whilst successive English governments have pursued neo-liberal policy agendas providing a degree of continuity, it always remains somewhat bewildering to the outsider to observe the landslide effect that a new English government can have. These events not only influence the policy agenda and a reshuffling of departments but can also result in the introduction or removal of sub-national administrative levels. By contrast, in most northwest European countries, the effect of a new government can perhaps be best described by the analogy of steering an oil tanker onto a new course. The question of Allmendinger and Haughton in the introduction to this special issue 'Is the English experience distinctive?', therefore acquires particular legitimacy and immediacy when approached from the comparative or 'outsider's' perspective, that this article was asked to provide. This perspective will be developed here by examining the recent developments in the Netherlands, France, and Germany.

Whilst neo-liberal thinking has influenced spatial policies and territorial governance across Europe, its form and significance varies, in part reflecting different national conditions and traditions. France, Germany, the Netherlands, and UK each represent different political, legal, and administrative 'families' in Europe (Newman & Thornley, 1996; Zweigert & Koetz, 1998; Balchin & Sykora, 1999; Farinos Dasi & Milder, 2006). Additionally, several studies have highlighted how different constitutions and legal systems can affect the role of plans and instruments that might be used in planning practice (Larsson, 2006; Nadin & Stead, 2008; Knieling &

Othengrafen, 2009). It is the aim of this article to identify and analyze discursive changes in (national) planning policies, allowing an exploration of how neo-liberalization processes influence spatial planning in different contexts.

Spatial planning is a euro-English concept (Williams, 1996) that covers various policy domains and planning traditions (CEC, 1997; Farinos Dasi & Milder, 2006; Stead & Nadin, 2009). Here, it is adopted as an umbrella concept referring to a government activity aiming to influence the way in which territory develops. This means that spatial planning is oriented towards attempting to shape the future built environment, especially with regard to the future distribution of people, activities, and resources in cities and regions in response to the demands of society or specific interests (Ryser & Franchini, 2008, p. 21). In performing a function of ‘anticipatory coordination’ (Alexander, 1998) and ‘framing subsequent decisions’ (Faludi, 2001), spatial planning is more than a technical task (preparing analysis and plans); it also describes a way of connecting planning knowledge and forms of action in the public domain (Friedmann, 1993, p. 482). Spatial planning not only controls and regulates present activities through objectives and maps of future land use (e.g. control of land use via a statutory spatial plan), but it also has a strategic orientation ‘seeking to influence the aspatial (non-physical) processes [...] such as economic, social and political forces that determine the spatial (physical) end product of the built environment’ (Greed, 2000, p. 2).

By looking at the effects of neo-liberalization processes on the role of spatial planning in France, Germany, and the Netherlands, this article analyzes discursive changes in (national) planning policies to unfold a rather broad perspective on how neo-liberal thinking affects spatial planning in a more general sense. Therefore, the article discusses neo-liberal shifts in public government and policies first before briefly reflecting on the recent changes in spatial planning policies in England. The subsequent section presents recent developments in the field of spatial planning in the Netherlands, Germany, and France and explores how neo-liberalization processes have been influential. From this analysis, a number of general themes and developments are considered that can be observed across the three countries, as well as in England.

Neo-liberal Shifts in Public Government and Policies

Evidence of neo-liberal influence can be found across the western world and in the European Union in particular. For Swyngedouw *et al.* (2002, pp. 552–553), neoliberalism refers to new modes of socioeconomic regulation, presenting a shift away from distributive policies, welfare considerations, and direct service provision towards more market-oriented and market-dependent approaches aimed at pursuing economic growth and competitive restructuring (see also Harvey, 1989; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012). The result is not so much a marginalization of the nation-state as a dramatic rethinking of how it mobilizes its powers and resources at sub-national level and through supranational agreements, to help it deliver its strategic objectives. One response has been a rescaling of government as part of a constant search for temporalspatial fixes (Jessop, 2004), including new forms of post-political governance (Swyngedouw, 2005, 2007). But whereas rescaling was initially premised on the need to better align administrative boundaries to functional areas and the scale at which societal processes occur, it is increasingly associated with reducing levels of government and, in fact, government as such. Following Purcell (2009, p. 141), ‘the doctrine of neoliberalism is in many ways the reassertion of a classical liberal economic argument: society functions better under a market logic than any other logic, especially a statedirected one’. Creating an open, frictionless market and removing barriers that hamper trade thus are key objectives of neo-liberal ideology.

Neo-liberalism has entered our political systems in waves, and for the purpose of the article, it is useful to briefly outline these. Particularly helpful is Keil’s (2009) differentiation, drawing on Peck and Tickell (2002), between the temporally entwined *roll-back* and *roll-out* neo-liberalization which now have made place for what he terms *roll-with-it* neo-liberalization. The former two waves reacted to the 1970s oil shock and global recession and restructured KeynesianFordist regimes of accumulation into neo-liberal post-Fordist regimes. The third, *go-with-it* neo-liberalism, wave has now largely supplemented or even replaced these by means of yet another round of restructuring the most important element of which is the normalization of neo-liberalism in practices and mindsets. In

contrast to the first two waves, that referred to previous Keynesian-Fordist social economic models, 'roll-with-it is self-referential and not in relation to something that has to first be brought down or bought in' (Keil, 2009, p. 232). In countries where rollwith-it neo-liberalization has acquired dominance, there is no sense of alternatives (good or bad) and neo-liberal subjects of all kinds, including spatial planning, coconstruct, sustain and also contest a now normalized neo-liberal society (Purcell, 2009).

The neo-liberal shift in public government and policies can in particular be related to the efficient conduct of government activities and the general norm of competition. It refers to entrepreneurialism, de-politicization, and agencification (Sager, 2009, p. 69). The belief system that has emerged from this contains a large number of interrelated concepts and principles that are relevant for this article. One such concept is the 'New Public Management' which, following Sager (2009, p. 70), refers to 'a universal economic model of governance claiming that market and business rationality can be made to operate as effectively in the public interest as it does in securing private interests'. In the public sector, this has led to a dominant focus on policy efficiency, delivery, and evaluation. A second, related, mechanism is that of lean and mean governments, privatizing and outsourcing former public tasks and services to volunteer organizations, community associations, non-profit corporations, foundations, and private firms (Purcell, 2009, p. 145). Quasi-public bodies, urban development corporations, and public-private partnerships carry out functions of the public sector. Following Sager (2009, p. 79), politicians have relinquished their decision-making powers in specific areas, including housing, infrastructure, and other areas affecting spatial development, to the neo-liberal governance mechanisms of competitive markets.

Another set of concepts relates to focusing on economic growth and competitiveness and results in selectivity and the exclusion of principles, interests, groups, or places. Following Swyngedouw *et al.* (2002, p. 552), 'the state withdraws to a greater or lesser extent from socially inclusive blanket distributionbased policies and from Keynesian demand-led interventions and replaces them with spatially targeted social policies and indirect promotion of entrepreneurship, particularly via selective deregulation' and public-private partnerships. Following neo-liberal discussions, competitiveness is not only 'the way it is', but also a *good* thing (Purcell, 2009, p. 145). This also means that other 'rationales' and

policy options are narrowed or reduced in a way: 'A polity that values the environment, for example, might feel it cannot make a strong environmental policy (e.g. signing up to the Kyoto Protocol) because it would make the area less competitive' (Purcell, 2009, p. 145). Additionally, the focus on economic growth and competitiveness produces political as well as economic and social inequality among cities and regions.

A Brief Reflection on Recent (Neo-liberal) Changes in English Planning Policies

When looking at the recent English experiences with spatial planning and the proposals of the Cameron administration to further reform the planning system, the influence of the neo-liberal thinking and context outlined above can be recognized. It is noteworthy, for example, that a recent government publication commences by clearly claiming that '*Planning is acting as a serious brake on growth, slowing the delivery of much needed new jobs and new business*' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011a). A classic case of reducing, replacing, and outsourcing government tasks is found in the 2010 White Paper 'Local Growth: Realising Every Place's Potential', which essentially proposes to decentralize planning to the level of communities. It rhetorically argues that communities know their areas better than anyone else, so that planning decisions should take place at the local level. By abolishing regional development agencies and regional planning strategies, which 'have been expensive, slow to prepare, and have alienated people' (p. 24), the national government aims to shift power to the local level where it expects it to generate the most impact and enable a more effective and tailor made exploitation of endogenous potential. It invites communities and people to take up ownership of their neighborhoods and stimulate economic development and growth from the bottom-up. This has also been referred to as 'open source planning'. Communities are however encouraged to take part in a so-called Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP), made up of business and councils 'whose geography properly reflects the natural economic areas of England' (p.12) and may span that of several communities.

The shift of power comes with some new instruments. Following Cowell (2012), local ‘communities’ will have new right-to-build powers, enabling them to deliver small-scale development without the need for a separate planning application, to make development easier. Existing responsibilities in the fields of community transport and crime prevention were granted a decade ago. In this context, parishes were, and still are, supposed to channel through local opinion to higher tier local government and as such may be consulted in relation to planning. So, the open-source planning philosophy does not come out of the blue and may even be regarded an evolution of the 2003 ‘Sustainable Communities’ program. The weak point, however, in comparison to this more generously resourced New Labor program is the lack of financial incentives (see Pugalis & Townsend, 2012). In England, the lack of resources is partly made up by the Regional Growth Fund which has been increased from 1 to 1.4 billion Great Britain Pounds.

This fund itself, however, is a mechanism to promote further outsourcing of planning and increase the dominance of the private sector. Only private stakeholders or public–private partnerships are eligible to submit bids and the main criterion is economic growth. Where they exist Local Enterprise Partnerships may assist in formulating the bid. Bids themselves are selected by an Advisory Panel, which guarantees a large influence of the national government. Central government makes the public funding for public infrastructure available only to those communities with a successful and growing private sector and only if the private sector also facilitates these measures and projects.

These represent only a few examples of how the neo-liberal agenda influences planning in England (for more details see also the other contributions in this issue). The overall impression is one of a planning phobia, at least as far as spatial planning is concerned, which according to our interpretation is by necessity a public activity. Apparently, however, spatial planning is neither regarded as a proper mechanism for policy coordination and creating synergies nor as an effective means for policy delivery and strategic thinking about the future. Rather, economic development is regarded the focal point for policy and stakeholder integration, with Local Enterprise Partnerships taking over the economic development role of the former regional planning bodies. At the same time, and reflecting its current political status, planning has been relegated to the lowest government level that has become the linchpin of the planning

system, but for the execution of tasks, it is made heavily dependent on alliances with private sector stakeholders. The role of the national government is to provide a simplified and broad-brush set of substantive and procedural planning principles through a National Planning Policy Framework (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2011b). All in all, it remains to be seen how effective this strategy, which is entirely premised on economic growth, will be in times of global recession. Key issues that might arise as the new approach is implemented include: How to balance between prosperous and lagging regions, cities or districts? How to prevent a situation where private investment will only be made in those municipalities and areas which seem to offer the highest return? How to avoid certain actors, groups, and interests prevailing at the expense of the society?

Some Experiences in Northwest Europe

With the English examples in mind, the question raises whether this is unique in Europe or whether similar trends can be observed elsewhere too. Despite its ubiquity, it seems that neo-liberalism is discussed more in both academic and political circles in the UK than in most other European countries. To some extent, this reflects the historical trajectories of different countries and the extent to which different forms of liberalism have molded their economic, political, and social evolution. However, this does not mean that aspects and elements of neo-liberal ideology do not find their way into other European countries (see, for example, Swyngedouw *et al.*, 2002; Falleth *et al.*, 2010). Reflecting this, the influence of neo-liberalization on spatial planning in northwest European countries is arguably more subtle than that presently experienced in England. The following section—through exploratory overviews of discursive changes in Germany, the Netherlands, and France—briefly considers the effects and impacts of neo-liberalism on (national) spatial planning policies in those countries.

The Netherlands

Neo-liberal thinking entered Dutch politics from the mid-1980s. Roughly two periods of neo-liberalism can be distinguished since then. The first period ranges from the mid-1980s to the early 2000s and can be described in terms of *roll-back* and *roll-out* neo-liberalism. Its influence on the comprehensive integrated planning approach followed in the Netherlands was considerable but restricted to a shift in planning objectives and new implementation solutions, mainly emphasizing public–private partnerships. The second period commenced at a time of unprecedented political turmoil and runs up to the present day. In this period, neo-liberalism takes the shape of *rolling-with-it* and the effects on planning are larger, to the extent of (almost) completely abolishing spatial planning at the national level.

Neo-liberalization stage I: A substantive turn in planning. A seeding ground emerged in the 1980s for neo-liberal experiments reflecting a combination of a severe economic crisis, the role of influential politicians such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, a need to reorganize the government's budget, and some failed state attempts to aid industrial sectors. Planning had to reinvent itself after serving a predominantly housing provision and socialist agenda from the 1970s to the early 1980s. With the Fourth Planning Report (1988), the focus shifted from housing to facilitating an economic development agenda.

The Randstad was identified as the key area for the country's international competitiveness, and the system of equal distribution and equal regions was replaced by a policy named 'regions under their own steam'. Other key spatial concepts included identifying the so-called mainports (Rotterdam harbor and Schiphol airport), urban nodes, and the national spatial-economic 'main structure' as focal points for investment and development. Planning, however, continued to pay attention to environmental issues, by means of the concept of 'ecological main structure' and more generally maintaining the post-war urban–rural dichotomy discourse, or 'doctrine', as argued by Faludi and Van der Valk (1994). Also, the relative position of planning vis-à-vis sectoral policies and their mutual coordination mechanisms by and large remained intact.

New implementation methods were explored mainly by public–private partnerships. Whereas the economic development policy was maintained in the Fourth Planning Report Extra (1990, known as Vinex) carrying the stamp of Labor minister Alders, this re-introduced a focus on housing

provision in ‘compact cities’ and on government indicated and defined (Vinex) sites bordering the existing urban landscape. These Vinex sites became prey for the private sector, both in terms of investors and real estate developers who unexpectedly (for the government) started buying all available land where such sites could potentially be designated, and in terms of public–private partnerships forming to develop these sites.

A turning point was reached in 2001 with the Fifth national planning document. This never passed the Lower House partly due to the early resignation of the cabinet, but also because it was contested in parliament. Reminiscent of the urban–rural dichotomy ‘doctrine’ the policy proposed ‘red’ and ‘green contours’ to designate the focal areas for construction and ecological preservation, respectively, with areas in-between designated as so-called ‘balancing areas’, for which no clear regime was developed (Priemus, 2004). The restrictive character of this proposal led to debates concerning the balance between ‘restrictive planning’ and ‘development planning.’ The fundamental underlying question was whether the national government, or in fact any governmental layer, had the right to issue binding legislation on regional and local land use and whether it could force conditions on citizens and companies that happened to live or do business in certain places. Even within the coalition, this question was not answered in a satisfactory way.

Neo-liberalization stage II: Planning contested. After new elections in 2002, associated with the assassination of maverick politician Pim Fortuyn, a new political climate emerged marked by a move of nearly all parties to the right. The motto of the Balkenende led coalition was: ‘decentralization if possible, central government if necessary’, which reflected the wish for ‘less government’ and more regional, local, and individual freedom. Planning was affected, too: restrictive elements of the system were to be abolished to promote an overall development-oriented policy.

This way of thinking materialized in the National Spatial Strategy (2004), issued by the Balkenende (II) coalition. With a new Spatial Planning Act being prepared in parallel (which came into force in June 2008), the strategy mainly laid down a new governance model, along the lines of the cabinet’s decentralization motto. To this end, the new Act cuts the formal hierarchical ties between national, provincial, and local spatial plans.

For its implementation, planning had always relied on spending sector departments. This partly changed after the 2006 elections when planning got command over a modest but for planning relatively big budget. The main purpose was to carry out a range of projects, about 40, under the Randstad Urgent Program. Curiously, the Randstad 2040 spatial vision (2008) was developed as one of the projects itself, whereas under ‘old style’ planning it would have been developed beforehand as a framework for identifying projects. In line with the New Public Management approach, the emphasis is shifting to a project approach and to generating outputs and delivering. Responding to lengthy processes in the past of developing infrastructure, in particular, the Betuwe freight railway connecting Rotterdam to Germany, advisory committees have been installed to analyze the quickest and most effective procedures for spatial development project implementation. Also, the profile of personnel at the ministry reflects this turn in spatial planning, with traditional spatial planners becoming dominated by project managers, resulting already in a significant loss of collective memory.

Following the 2010 elections, the national planning agency now barely exists, surviving only as a reduced in size part of the ministry of Infrastructure and Environment, which, after nearly five decades, no longer carries ‘spatial planning’ in its name. When the *roll-with-it* neo-liberal minority coalition led by Mark Rutte took office in 2010, everything pointed towards a complete abolition of planning at the national level. Similar to the English planning phobia, spatial planning in all its manifestations, even when it aims to facilitate economic development, is judged a hindrance for the freedom of individuals and companies. Moreover, in the current populist political climate, spatial planning together with other interests, such as culture, environment, and nature, has become framed as a leftist hobby: a label which legitimizes its complete relegation in government priorities.

A year later, however, it can be concluded that national planning has survived, albeit in a reduced form. The 2011 Structure Vision Infrastructure and Spatial Planning, which is in no sense equivalent to the bold strategic planning documents of the past, is squarely aimed at stimulating economic development in a limited number of areas where so-called economic ‘top-sectors’ are located. Already under the former government planning was put at the service of infrastructure provision, by making it part of the heavily

funded long-term program on infrastructure, space, and transport (in Dutch language abbreviated as MIRT). An earlier version of this program did not include spatial matters but after failed attempts to implement new infrastructure in regions, a more spatially integrated approach is followed based on multi-level administrative agreements. Because of the hands-off approach by the national government, planning itself effectively has been decentralized to the 12 provinces, but without granting them further instruments and resources, which leaves them struggling with their new role. This effectively means the political demise of planning. Moreover, the very existence of provinces themselves is under discussion and their continuation remains uncertain.

Germany

In Germany, neo-liberal thinking entered politics in the mid-1980s but with the reunification other urgent (spatial) policy objectives, i.e. the goal of achieving greater parity in living conditions between old and new *La`nder* (federal states) over the medium-term, were emphasized. This might be one reason why neo-liberalism did not take root as it did in England and, to a lesser extent, in the Netherlands. Another reason might be found in the German Basic Law, which divides authority between the federal government and the *La`nder*. The German Basic Law vests the *La`nder* with state authority and with territorial sovereignty. Spatial planning is accordingly decentralized, and federal spatial planning is limited ‘to the development of guiding principles and principles of spatial planning which also provide the legal basis for state spatial planning and superordinate specifications for sectoral planning’ (PahlWeber & Henckel, 2008, p. 38). Due to the manifold interrelations and legal competences between the Federation and the constitutive *La`nder*, there is no ubiquitous neo-liberal pattern visible—identifying and analyzing the discursive changes in German national planning policies is thus difficult. The following section therefore presents illustrative examples of the recent developments on both the federal level and the level of the *La`nder*.

Modest approaches towards neo-liberalization: Marketization of the public domain. As in many other countries, the German welfare system is under pressure to reform (Schubert *et al.*, 2008, p. 17), following a limited variant

of what might be termed a ‘neo-liberal agenda’: public expenditures are no longer regarded as being essential, the defined contributions covering living standards have been diminishing and the marketization of public domains is increasing. In addition, public benefits are being cut and the role of the state is being narrowed. This also applies to the field of spatial planning where the current government, for example, decided to cut the budgets for the Federation-Länder ‘Urban Development Funding’ as well for the Federation-Länder Program ‘Socially Integrative City’. The change from a comprehensive social welfare state to a kind of basic social care (Kleinhenz, 2005), even if the state has still central functions with regard to the selective provision of social benefits in a market economy, can also be observed in the field of territorial policies in the last two decades. The German political-administrative system has adopted the principles of New Public Management, focusing on a project approach to generate policy efficiency, output, and delivery. This also means that public authorities increasingly involve or negotiate with private actors to implement specific developments leading to a marketization of planning as expression of roll-back neo-liberalization as the increasing number of public-private partnerships and business improvement districts indicate (Heinz, 2006; Brenner, 2010).

Additionally, the guiding principles of territorial planning and development, through the introduction of metropolitan growth regions (BMVBS, 2006), recently seem to have shifted away from ‘providing equal living conditions’ in all parts of the country. Metropolitan regions and functional city-regions were introduced as a new spatial category at the national level in Germany in 1995 (in a top-down approach) in an effort to strengthen the competitiveness of German cities and regions in the context of global competition. In 2006, the concept was complemented by introducing *Großräumige Verantwortungsgemeinschaften* (supra-regional partnerships), connecting rural areas with urban cores to pursue a balanced (intra-regional) spatial structure. This policy approach recognizes the unevenness of the German territory and the need for social solidarity and spatial justice, by developing new types of urban–rural partnerships, fostering a new assertiveness of rural areas, and by considering rural areas as economically and socially vital places. However, not all municipalities and regions within a metropolitan region will benefit from the economic growth of the region’s core. Furthermore, the 11 metropolitan regions do

not cover the whole territory, meaning that Germany could be divided into metropolitan regions and other spatial structures. But this leaves the question of what happens to the nonmetropolitan regions when metropolitan regions are identified with economic growth and competitiveness? Will they get less attention? Will public and private investments mainly be focused in metropolitan regions and what is the role of spatial planning in these processes? As shown above, similar discussions can be observed in England, even if national spatial policy has not changed that dramatically in Germany, meaning that no new laws or legal competencies have been introduced—‘only’ the national spatial policy guidelines have been revised slightly.

Neo-liberalization: Restrictive attitudes and factors. Obviously, spatial planning, despite its mission to provide general public services, is aiming at spatial or economic development and providing conditions for economic growth. As this can also be recognized in a number of studies and guidelines at various spatial scales, the principles of neo-liberalism seem to be normalized in spatial policies and mindsets. The recently published study of the Future Council of the Bavarian State Government (2010), titled ‘Sustainable society—Bavaria in the proceeding process of internationalisation’, for example, concentrates on the economic future and competitiveness of Bavaria by focusing on the main cities and the strengthening and cross-linkage of urban nodes (p. 31). A new governance structure is suggested by introducing new types of urban–rural partnerships. The cooperation between cities and their surroundings is necessary to retain access to resources such as workforce, research and development, supplying industries, international transport hubs, education, or culture (p. 53). With regard to spatial planning, an emphasis is placed on infrastructure planning and the extension of information and communication technologies. Furthermore, many existing administrative borders of cities and counties are no longer regarded as appropriate for spatial development; additionally, it is suggested that bordering public utility companies (for example, water supply, local public transport companies, etc.) should be merged with each other (ibid., p. 56). However, as previously mentioned, the principle of equal living conditions is not generally challenged but rather it is re-interpreted in terms of ‘approximate’ equal living conditions. With regard to the accessibility of the urban economic cores, this means a city region with

a radius of 60 minutes—this is roughly the distance which is regarded as being acceptable to come to the urban core by public transport or by car. Additionally, a territorial and socio-economically balanced development as well as ecological development is intended to play an important role for Bavaria's future development, but only if the competitiveness of Bavaria is not threatened.

The study is considered to be controversial by politicians, scientists, and planners in Bavaria and other German La"nder. This is not surprising as the formerly broad scope of the German welfare system, including the strong orientation towards social inclusion and egalitarianism (Aiginger & Guger, 2006; Alber, 2006), found its 'spatial expression' in legislation including the Federal Building Act and the Federal Building Code's guiding principles of providing equal living conditions, ensuring sustainable urban development and avoiding unbalanced population structures. This clearly indicates that territorial policies have been influenced by social objectives from the 1950s onwards. The German planning system, with its comprehensive integrated approach and its systematic and formal hierarchy of plans, since then has aimed (and is still aiming) at the prevention or compensation of spatial and economic disparities. Together with fiscal instruments such as the fiscal equalization among the states and the solidarity tax, this ensured and still assures a reasonably balanced socio-economically developed territory across Germany. It can be argued then, that some impacts of a more neo-liberal (political) agenda have been cushioned by national spatial policies as the spatial principles and the spatial planning system in general—both governed by law—are robust in that they remain in force even when governments change. For example, though the Christian Democrats came into power in the federal state of Hessen in 1999, after a period of almost 50 years of governments led by the Social Democrats, the principles of sustainability, equivalent living conditions, the protection and development of natural resources, and the avoidance of unbalanced population structures remained unaffected.

Spatial planning: Economic growth as a new rationale? The study of the Future Council of the Bavarian State Government alluded to earlier also shows a new type of program that public bodies are using with regard to spatial planning and development. Many municipalities are developing (strategic) plans or visions, which they are not obliged to do. On the one

hand, this shows that spatial planning, unlike in some other European countries, is not confined to land-use planning, regulating exclusively the use of a certain piece of ground. It clearly indicates that spatial planning is rather an activity that seeks to coordinate all spatially relevant interests, functions, programs, and projects. On the other hand, it has become apparent in many cities that all these plans, visions, or strategies are essentially focusing on (economic) growth and competitiveness or at least on providing the conditions for economic growth. These visions or strategies are not spatial plans in the traditional sense; they are documents with programmatic statements aiming at the provision of conditions required for economic growth and competitiveness. This has consequences for spatial planning, as it does hardly play any role in these new visions or programs; it is not part of the metropolitan regions' or municipalities' competences to strengthen economic development and competitiveness. It can be concluded then, that neo-liberal principles are apparently valued as necessary and 'good', whereas other policy rationales and options as an integral part of spatial planning policies are—in comparison to economic competitiveness and employment—seen as having diminishing importance.

France

The emergence of the French *aménagement du territoire* approach, generally referred to as the 'regional economic planning' approach, was underpinned by the concept of 'spatial solidarity', with the aim of spreading the 'fruits of growth' (Mazet, 2000, p. 6) across the national territory. An important step in the institutionalization of *aménagement du territoire* was the creation of the Délégation à l'Aménagement du Territoire et à l'Action Régionale (DATAR): the national agency for spatial planning and regional action) in 1963 (Mazet, 2000). Census and other data tends to confirm the relative success of this policy with many of the regions and cities traditionally seen as being lagging or peripheral in France's spatial structure, having had growing populations and increasing economic weight over recent decades (Woessner, 2009). From the mid1970s until the 1990s, however, economic crisis and restructuring, unemployment, challenges to the socio-democratic model of the state with the growing influence of neo-liberal thought, state reform, and on-going European integration formed the wider context for the pursuit of *aménagement du territoire*.

In the 1990s, the system was reformed with an evolution from a centrally driven redistributive model towards a more bottom-up approach based on empowering lower levels and supporting the endogenous development capacities of particular territories (Josserand, 2002; Comité Stratégique de la DATAR, 2003). Territorial 'projects' aimed at stimulating regeneration and innovation and federating the capacities of territorial actors are the mechanism through which areas are encouraged to develop a mobilizing vision for their own development. The state still plays a supportive role through the use of territorial contracts which contribute towards funding projects (DgCID, 2006, p. 53). In 2005, a competitive call for 15 Metropolitan Projects encouraged local authorities in major urban areas to cooperate on projects to enhance the international standing and competitiveness of their areas. The successful bids sought to foster growth and competitiveness and address issues such as urban sprawl and social and economic exclusion (DgCID, 2006, p. 61), in metropolitan cooperation areas which were effectively soft spaces (Haughton *et al.*, 2010) given definition through a contractual and flexible approach designed to deliver coherent governance for 'pertinent' or functional geographies. The shift in emphasis from a traditional 'redistributive' regional policy approach, to an enhanced focus on territorial competitiveness, was underlined in autumn 2005 when the name of DATAR was changed to Délégation Interministérielle à l'aménagement et la compétitivité des territoires (DIACT: Interministerial Agency for Spatial Planning and Competitiveness).

The regulatory 'urbanisme' system of land-use planning has also experienced reform. In 1999, the center-left Jospin Government passed the law on Urban Solidarity and Renewal. This represented a broadening of the focus of the land-use planning 'urbanisme' system (Booth, 2003) and promoted 'the mobilisation of local politicians around a common urban development project encompassing housing, transport, the control of land use and economic activity' (Mazet, 2000, p. 159). The law sought to enhance 'solidarité' (solidarity) within urban areas and achieve a more even distribution of social housing in the interests of achieving greater social-mix. At the strategic level, the law introduced a new planning instrument, the schéma de cohérence territoriale (SCOT: territorial coherence plan), to provide a forward-looking framework for development and sectoral policies (Booth, 2003). During the 2007 Presidential campaign, Nicolas Sarkozy

promised reform of the system for gaining planning permission. Measures to simplify the process of securing planning permission are currently under development with the goal to move from a norm-based/regulatory planning to a planning for projects.

The principle of ‘equalization’ also justifies state action in parts of urban areas facing regeneration challenges through France’s *Politique de la Ville*—an extensive urban policy also addressing regeneration at the neighborhood level. The influence of liberalization on this has been observed, for example, in the *Pacte de relance pour la ville* (PRV) launched by the right-of-center Juppé government in the mid-1990s. Dikec (2006, p. 71) argues that the ‘main idea’ behind the PRV was to ‘foster economic activity and to increase employment through tax concessions and public subsidies in designated areas’. *Zones urbaines sensibles* (ZUS: vulnerable urban areas) facing problems such as poor housing and unemployment were designated incorporating *Zones de revitalisation urbaine* (ZRU: urban revitalisation zones) and *Zones franches urbaines* (ZFU: economic opportunity zones) intended to aid the economic development of poor neighborhoods and give tax exemptions of five years to small businesses. Hall and Hickman describe such measures as a ‘brief flirtation on the part of the French authorities with “Anglo-Saxon” style economic regeneration, based on fiscal deregulation, in the form of enterprise zones’ (2002, p. 693), whilst for Dikec (2006, p. 71) ‘The PRV was arguably the closest French urban policy got to a neoliberal approach, with a shift in focus from solidarity between communes to economic success within strictly defined spaces of intervention’.

The practices of spatial planning and urban policy have therefore been influenced by the liberalization trends affecting many countries. *Aménagement du territoire* itself has evolved from a traditional state-directed redistributive regional policy approach to one where the state seeks to ‘accompany’ territories as they seek to develop their own territorial potential—acting perhaps as a guarantor of equality of opportunity rather than of outcome for different places. The liberally inspired notion of the ‘*compétitivité*’ (competitiveness) of territories was in ascendance in the 2000s as well-illustrated by the rechristening of the DATAR as DIACT. More recently, the DATAR acronym has been revived and now stands for *Délégation interministérielle à l’Aménagement du Territoire et à*

l'Attractivité Régionale (DATAR, 2011) emphasizing the perhaps less neo-liberal-sounding 'attractivité' (attractiveness) over 'compétitivité'.

Land-use planning has been reformed and called-upon to widen its remit and act as a framework promoting the coherence of the projects supported by aménagement du territoire and the spatially significant decisions of public and private actors. In keeping with trends in other countries, it has also been expected to act as a positive 'urbanisme de projet' (a planning for projects) rather than an ostensibly enterprise dampening 'urbanisme de normes' (regulatory planning). Reforms are underway to simplify the process of securing planning permission and render the planning framework more dynamic and supple in order to make life easier for those seeking to pursue development and construction projects. Such framing of planning reform carries echoes of developments in the other countries, for example, the debate in Dutch planning concerning the balance between 'restrictive planning' and 'development planning'. An interesting contrast with England however is the timescale within which such changes have been introduced which seems much more drawn-out in France in comparison with the rapid changes introduced following the 2010 UK general election. Finally, as regards urban policy a mixing of concerns for welfarist 'solidarité' (solidarity) with disadvantaged areas and residents alongside opportunity-driven business and property-led regeneration is also observable.

Comparing Trends

Looking at the developments in England and comparing these to the experiences in France, Germany, and the Netherlands, many similarities can be discerned in how planning has developed. However, some important differences remain even if it is clear that neo-liberalization processes have had an impact in all four countries. Everywhere the focus of spatial planning has been narrowed down to concentrate on facilitating economic development and competitive regions. Spatial planning, albeit in different ways, has become framed and molded within a larger picture of economic growth, de-regulation and reduction of administrative complexity (for instance for acquiring planning permission), a decentralizing and re-centralizing of power, a shift towards private sector and civil society

involvement, and a focus on more efficient, effective, and project-oriented policy delivery.

A striking difference, however, can be found in the status and scope of spatial planning policies. Whereas in the Netherlands the position of planning seems to be diminished gradually, in England the coordinative role of planning has been radically and rapidly challenged since 2010 with economic development being promoted as the main goal of place-based policy, to be both substantively and organizationally delivered by means of local enterprise partnerships. In contrast, in both France and Germany, planning is regarded an important mechanism to provide equal and favorable living conditions in all regions. Additionally, spatial planning is required to respond to the demands of the global economy and increase both national and regional competitiveness. Similarly, in the Netherlands, planning and 'space' as a frame of integration, albeit in a less statutory fashion, is gradually being re-discovered as an effective tool in long-term programs to implement infrastructure in urban regions. Perhaps, these experiences point towards what may be called a 'second life' of spatial planning, one that works alongside but not necessarily in isolation from statutory planning (see Haughton *et al.*, 2010). This implies a type of spatial planning that is of a more entrepreneurial character where the objective is not only spatial ordering but predominantly spatial development.

In addition to these broad observations, three more issues can be identified with regard to neo-liberalization that have not fully crystallized yet. These concern (1) the planning of non-statutory areas, (2) the exclusion of groups and places, and (3) the differential pace and intensity of neo-liberal influence. These issues will be briefly elaborated upon now.

Planning for non-statutory areas-----Emergent spatial visioning. As has become clear rescaling is occurring more often and is increasingly associated with reducing government. The picture that emerges is that every level between the national and the local is up for discussion. In these rescaling processes, it does not really matter whether regions are constituted by a written constitution or not. If not they are simply abolished, as the English example shows. In cases where they are, competences are shifted between governance levels, as the Dutch experience shows. However, this apparent shift is in reality only nominal in character. Provinces have not been granted new instruments or resources and are still in the process of

ascertaining how to deal with their new position. As an effect, the position of spatial planning becomes significantly weaker. One exception might be Germany where the federal level, after a legal amendment in the Regional Planning Act, is currently exploring the possibility of developing a national spatial plan.

All this shuffling and reshuffling of formal competences from one level to the other also seems to provoke a counter reaction: the development of spatial visioning for non-statutory areas. In France, Germany, and the Netherlands, we observe an increase of spatial visions for all kinds of ‘new’ regions or soft spaces (see also Haughton *et al.*, 2010 for the UK). Examples concern the informal strategies drafted at metropolitan level based on voluntary cooperation between the central city and adjacent municipalities. The geographical boundaries of such cooperative regions are largely determined in a bottom-up fashion. The German metropolitan regions have been referred to above, but we can also point to the spatial visioning exercises in the Amsterdam Metropolitan Area and the South Wing of the Randstad in the Netherlands. In contrast to more regular statutory spatial plans on the local level, which coordinate various spatial demands and provide legal certainty, these new informal visions aim at developing regional identities and mobilizing public, private, and civic stakeholders in order to become more competitive and use economic potentials, therewith responding to the neo-liberal context. French national policies have already been quite successful in stimulating such relatively voluntary planning processes focusing on competitiveness and spatial development. France in this sense provides an example of national government not trying to frantically restructure the country but rather seeking to constructively use or facilitate regional capacity.

Spatial justice and the exclusion of groups and places. A more problematic issue that can be observed in all countries to a greater or lesser extent is a more selective focus on the priorities and locations to support. Again, the ‘marketization’ of spatial planning and development will probably result in a neglect of nonmonetized issues and interests (social housing, environmental protection, etc.) thus far represented by public spatial planning. Here, the thematic selectivity becomes obvious in the pursuit of economic objectives. As shown above, a selective course is followed more explicitly by the national government in England and the Netherlands

concentrating on (private) investment in those municipalities and areas which seem to have the highest return. In France, selectivity occurs as the result of interplay between regional and national stakeholders, whereas the German government is controversially discussing how to interpret and to guarantee spatial justice at the regional scale. This might be seen as marking the passing of welfare state planning. One country may take this step more easily than another, depending on issues such as internal regional balance, political context, and tradition. Perhaps, the abolishing of spatial planning for balanced development is ultimately the most significant and fundamental effect of neoliberalization.

A significant question raised by this is how will such a development influence the concept of the nation state? What kinds of mechanisms exist to ensure that certain actors or groups do not prevail at the expense of society or the 'national' public interest? After all, what is the relevance of the concept of a territorially organized and bounded state once large shares of its population do no longer feel part of it? Is this, ultimately, the implicit purpose of neo-liberalization proper: the dismantling of the nation state? If so, this may well be the Achilles heel of neo-liberalization as several forces may react against this and restore a focus on (re-)building the nation state. The result will likely be a different kind of state, and likely one in which planning, as facilitator of state building, could again play a role. However, if neo-liberalism prevails in the end, counter reactions are still to be expected, not at national level but at regional or local level as citizens might protest against privately owned and managed developments they did not ask for or from whose planning process they have been excluded (for example 'Stuttgart 21' in Germany).

The different pace and intensity of neo-liberal influence. Obviously, there are significant differences between the four countries discussed here in terms of the pace and intensity with which they seem to adapt to neo-liberal agendas. England is the most radical follower, whereas it seems that Germany and, to a slightly lesser extent, France are strongly resisting neo-liberal patterns. The Netherlands with its open economy and dependence on international trade fits somewhere in between, but clearly, like England before it, is now also *rolling-with* neoliberalism. To help understand how neo-liberalization processes impact on societies and planning systems in continental Europe, it is instructive to consider the distinction between the

recent Anglo-Saxon and the Rhineland macroeconomic models of capitalism. Both models can be regarded to be products of domestic history and culture and therefore are deeply rooted in society. The Anglo-Saxon model, which is more closely related to neo-liberal thinking, is associated with, amongst other characteristics, free markets, short-term profit seeking and restricting government actions away from direct intervention and provision of services in favor of market supportive re-regulation. The Rhineland model, in contrast, is associated with, amongst other factors, long-term perspectives on development, based on elaborate negotiations between a variety of societal partners and collective action that benefits both markets and society.

The models, and their various interpretations from country to country, have been instrumental in shaping planning systems. It can be hypothesized that either a regional economic (e.g. France) or comprehensive integrated approach (e.g. the Netherlands, Germany) to spatial planning would fit well within the context of a Rhineland model (Nadin & Stead, 2008), aiming at comprehensive perspectives for territorially balanced structures. The land-use or management approach (e.g. UK) better reflects the needs and dynamics of an Anglo-Saxon macroeconomic model where planning with strong statutory powers acts not only as a regulator of the market but also as a mechanism for negotiating and allocating land usage rights and facilitating development.

What the different pace of neo-liberalization in the four counties suggests is that, in the long run, planning policies and systems rooted in a Rhineland macroeconomic model of capitalism will potentially be more severely impacted by neo-liberalization trends than those rooted in Anglo-Saxon contexts, as these processes undermine some of their fundamental principles. Shifting from a more restrictive, regulating and tightly knitted planning practice to a more developmentoriented and entrepreneurial type of planning takes time. All this implies that planning may have to reinvent itself as a policy that is able to provide added value in a context characterized by fluidity, temporality, and marketization, with a dual emphasis on the rule of law and legal protection alongside an enhanced attention to issues around individual freedom and results on demand.

Conclusion

This article has outlined the general direction in which spatial planning is heading in Northwest Europe, identifying common trends but also highlighting variations in substance, procedures, timing, and pace among the observed countries. There can be little doubt that as a result of neo-liberalization processes the political position of planning is becoming weaker and that spatial planning itself is changing in terms of its objectives and processes. This is not only the case in the UK, but also in other parts of Europe as the Dutch, French, and German examples have shown. Globalization, Europeanization, and individualization processes further catalyze these trends.

Is it then possible to argue that English planning is the odd one out in terms of its exposure to neo-liberalizing influences? The answer is twofold. *No*, in a sense, that spatial planning systems and policies all over Europe are affected by what might be broadly termed neo-liberalization processes. *Yes*, in the sense that English planning experiences are related to more radical or disruptive decisions. England thus remains a forerunner in terms of neo-liberal policymaking. As such the transformation that English planning is experiencing and the general direction it is heading in may provide pointers (both negative and positive) for the future of planning in other European countries.

Whilst at the local level a demand for land-use planning or management will remain, questions now exist about the future role for spatial planning at higher spatial scales. Additionally, some of the objectives that spatial planning traditionally aims at are coming under pressure due to the shift of emphasis towards economic growth and competitiveness. The provision of social housing and public services, or the protection of natural landscapes, for example, might come to be seen as voluntary or even redundant, rather than as forming planning objectives in their own right.

However, as the developments in France and Germany have shown, the focus on spatial development and quality can also contribute added value in today's processes of urban and regional development and policy delivery. The French and German examples indicate that in neo-liberal times, there is still a demand for spatial planning. In both countries, spatial planning has obviously started to rethink its fundamental principles and evaluate how it

can be aligned in a meaningful way with neo-liberalization agendas. In doing so, it would be too simple to suggest that planning should fully adapt to neo-liberalism. Rather, we think and hope that spatial planning has intrinsic values to offer that can address some of the anomalies and contradictions of neo-liberalism, in particular in relation to issues of social and spatial exclusion.

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Afterword

Localism, Austerity and Planning

GRAHAM HAUGHTON & PHIL
ALLMENDINGER

Graham Haughton, School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK and Phil Allmendinger, University of Cambridge, UK.

Austerity Britain, Austerity Europe

The financial market crash that started in 2007 continues to resonate throughout Europe, with a prolonged recession evident in most countries, more severe in some than others. In early 2013 the Cyprus banking crisis became the latest potent symbol of the problems facing European countries at the moment. With banks over-exposed to the extent that domestic governments alone cannot solve the problems they create, international bodies have had to step in to help out. And with this external intervention has come a loss of control over domestic policy and a crushing imperative to reduce state expenditure in order to ‘balance the books’ of national governments. Austerity economics and austerity politics are the new norm in Europe, presented as the necessary solution to the problems of economies facing chronic structural problems as they adjust to the fact that the financial services sector has proven to be a drag on national economic growth, not a silver bullet solution to the aftermath of de-industrialisation.

It is against this background that the UK government has continued to back its ‘Plan A’ for addressing the country’s straitened finances, meaning

substantial cuts to state expenditure especially support for the poor. Or to put it another way, the expensive bail out of banks and attempts to keep them 'working' through the recession through a programme of 'quantitative easing' has seen an unprecedented period of corporate welfare being introduced alongside a massive roll-back of welfare for the poor and reductions in public sector jobs. Though the political message is that all must share the pain of the consequent cuts to public services, in practice the impacts are being felt very unevenly indeed, with punitive welfare cuts for the poorest explicitly positioned in national political discourse as part of a necessary disciplining of unemployed 'shirkers' whilst rewarding the 'strivers' in working households. In the meantime, tax cuts, tax breaks and attacks on regulatory protection that might damage corporate profits have been put in place to benefit high income earners and businesses. This amounts to what Hay (2013) terms a 'crisis discourse'. Since 2010 the crisis discourse has been one of a 'crisis of debt' that requires austerity and deficit reduction, rather than a 'crisis of growth' that would look, instead, to fiscal expansion and investment. The Coalition's 'crisis of debt' discourse is, of course, a blame attribution strategy and one that conveniently justifies a state roll-back and redistribution of wealth to the rich beyond the dreams of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s.

Yet it is becoming clear that 'Plan A' is not working in Britain – we face a continuing recession, as money, demand and confidence are sucked out of the economy by the government's austerity measures. The Great Depression of the 1930s provides clear lessons about the need to keep liquidity high to avoid deflation and stagnation (Gamble 2009 pp. 56–7). In the present period, the UK government has opted to pump money into the banking system through its quantitative easing measures, but the money isn't generating demand in the economy as instead of lending it back out banks appear to have opted to use it to shore up their books, placate their shareholders and retain annual bonuses for the privileged few. It is possibly the most poorly targeted and misguided initiative in the history of central banking. In the meantime, people who lose their jobs in the public sector and elsewhere cannot go out and spend, businesses remain reluctant to invest in the face of slack demand, and so we remain locked in a self-fulfilling prophecy of continuing low growth. In short, not only is the austerity plan not working it is actually economically damaging.

The Twin-Pronged Attack on Planning

The current austerity crisis discourse for planning is paradigm reinforcing rather than paradigm threatening. By this we mean that the consequences of the crisis of austerity approach continue a longer-term shift in planning. The ‘problem’, according to the crisis of debt discourse is ‘too much planning’ not ‘how can planning support high quality, sustainable growth?’. Such a positive, growth related role for planning is becoming more distant than ever as planning capacity is lost as part of the de-regulatory attack on parts of the state that protect the weak against the strong. The right wing political attack on planning capacity is forcing those responsible for the relict local planning system to make some difficult choices, choices that are necessarily being influenced by the need to raise money to fund core planning activities.

This is part of a twin-pronged attack on planning. There is an overt, direct attack on planning through parliament. That these tactics are confused and contradictory is often evident, not least when proposals have run into public or parliamentary opposition, gain-saying the silky words of ministers that they are launching policies to appeal to a general public that is sick of the heavy hand of government. For in truth, the general public generally tolerates and often likes planning as a necessary check in a free democratic society. If nothing else, planning provides a mechanism to expose and check what are often perceived as bullying tactics by developers. Let’s be clear, it is the selfinterested business lobby that demands planning be reined in, not the public. Just two examples – the massive media campaign in 2011–12 led by national NGOs and backed by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* ensured the government had to back away from some of its more contentious proposals in its draft National Planning Framework. And in April 2013 ministerial attempts to introduce legislation to allow substantial home extensions to proceed without due consideration by the local planning authorities ran into a storm of protest from Conservative backbenchers keen to protect their constituents’ interests. National government ministers have rarely been so out of touch with popular sentiment as they are currently with planning, but driven by ideological zeal and a desire to appease big business ministers can’t stop

themselves from bringing forward plans to try to dismantle planning systems that work in the public interest.

This is why the second form of attack is being engaged in. This approach is indirect. As local government finances are cut, local authorities are being left to make hard choices about where to cut jobs – those protecting child welfare or planners for instance. Under the pretext of giving choice to local politicians, in truth this has been a process of washing hands of responsibility for funding decisions that ultimately stem from Westminster.

Regional level planning has already gone, with some of the knowledge and skills developed likely to be lost for good. We are now entering into a fifth year of cut-backs to local government funding and what slack there was in the system to absorb the cuts without affecting front-line service delivery has now largely gone. From this year on as new cuts come into force, services such as planning will suffer substantial job losses, and with this will come a massively reduced capacity. A survey of 81 local authorities in England and Wales reported in March 2013 an average expected cut in planning budgets of 10%, with 75% of those surveyed expecting to cut their planning budget in the following 12 months (Taylor *et al.* 2013). In some areas the cuts will be even more severe:

Cuts to town hall planning departments will weaken voters' influence over the future of their area and place it increasingly in the hands of property developers and their lawyers, leading architects have warned ...

Councils are slashing as much as 58% from their planning budgets between 2012 and 2014, according to Guardian research, with some of the biggest city councils cutting the most. Manchester is reducing its spending by 54%, Portsmouth by 49% and Liverpool by 35%... (Taylor *et al.* 2013).

In terms of planning, with loss of funding and staff comes a lack of capacity also to deal with developers and encourage them to revise their development proposals in ways that better fit with agreed local and national priorities, as expressed in national planning policy and adopted local plans. Put simply, the balance of power is shifting fundamentally away from notions of the public good in favour of private gain, from protecting the many to privileging the few. In place of democratically accountable local government controls over planning comes a further form of insidious undermining. If the public sector does not have the capacity to engage in forward planning then the private sector can help fill the void. It was announced by Housing Minister Mark Prisk in April 2013 that Local

Enterprise Partnerships will have a ‘crucial’ role in determining local housing demand as part of their Strategic Growth Plans, although this will not extend to setting housing targets (Geoghegan 2013).

Other parts of the local government sector, such as local libraries, are being at least as hard hit, if not more so, than planning, and these will all leave a legacy on local communities for generations to come. The problem with bad planning is that the physical legacy of poorly controlled development can damage lives too, and also impact more widely on the environment with irreversible consequences, as adversaries in the battles around greenfield site development regularly draw attention to.

There are few who would want to argue that planning should be kept at it was, certainly not us. Planning is invariably going to be seen as flawed by some, as any regulatory system is that seeks to address so many fundamental issues about quality of life now and for the future. There can be no doubt that planning is often slow, not least as the general public has become less deferential to authority, better informed and determined not to see their share of the property owning democracy promised to them by politicians adversely affected by what they perceive as poor quality development. The diverse and divergent views on how best to improve planning are rightly part of a democratic society – change is a good thing, albeit that constant change brings instability, inconsistency and incoherence. Nonetheless, some good will come out of the current reforms. Some of the worst excesses of the New Labour government will be lost, doubtless efficiencies will be gained by forcing planning authorities to look again at how they deliver their services. The rolling back of local state capacity that is intended to allow local communities to take control of decisions in their communities may be a hollow promise in the absence of government money to assist them, in effect a forced cooptation of local communities to fill the gaps left. So it is that even among the carnage being wreaked on the formal tiers of statutory planning at regional and local levels, there are signs of local activism that suggest that positive outcomes can still emerge, such as the rise in interest in community land trusts and co-housing, particularly for the elderly. Just as the experience of Coin Street Community Builders (Brindley *et al.* 1996) and Eldonians in Liverpool (Leeming 2002) showed in the 1980s when community groups sought to work around restrictive national and local government policies, out of adversity and market/state failure, sometimes opportunity and inspiration

arises, and indeed sometimes these flourish through their capacity to weave together funding sources from government and elsewhere.

Austerity Planning Redux

The implications of the changes outlined in this book in general, and in this chapter in particular, are potentially profound; not least because of the new planning regulations brought in by the current government which have created multiple routes for local planning authorities having their planning powers taken away and given to national government (Haughton and Hincks 2013). First, powers for major infrastructure proposals have been taken away from local government and given to central government. Second, if a local planning authority does not produce an agreed local plan within a short period, under new regulations government policy is that planning applications can be judged only against national planning guidance. Third, local planning authorities deemed to be making decisions in ways not to the Secretary of State's liking would have their powers taken away and instead given to the Planning Inspectorate. Fourth, if a developer has a proposal turned down and then chooses to take this to appeal or judicial review, local authorities stripped of cash will be hard pressed to justify continuing to hold to their guns. This is what Localism looks like in practice – centralism by any other name, a freedom to do what the government requires or face being stripped of your few remaining powers or face expensive legal proceedings in the knowledge that central government is unlikely to back you.

Remember this: the current changes to planning in Britain were ushered in with a fanfare of being about promoting localism and reducing the top-down, anti-democratic approach of central government. It was a hoax. An elaborate hoax, which every day becomes clearer. Future governments are going to have to unravel the mess that is currently being created and deal with the consequences of the poor quality developments that will be an inevitable consequence of the current policies being applied to planning. We may come to be grateful that the development industry is currently in a lull. Not all the development of the next few years will be poor quality of course – but the problem is we are losing the powers to stop poor quality

development proceeding without due scrutiny by the public and by planners working with and on behalf of the public.

Never Let a Good Crisis go to Waste

‘Never let a good crisis go to waste’ is a phrase often associated with Milton Friedman and others promoting the neoliberal approach (Klein 2008). Or to put it another way, every crisis creates an opportunity for someone. Current government ministers in the Department for Communities and Local Government certainly seem to have taken this to heart, making sure that the crisis of debt discourse is linked to bring in further deregulation, and to attempt to blame planners from stifling growth. What planners and others need to do is highlight and promote the alternative crisis-of-growth discourse and the role of planning and the public sector more generally in supporting and facilitating high quality development. Examples of such a role for planning abound, particularly in the successes of urban policy and regeneration where the public and private worked together.

In a world of rapidly circulating policy ideas, there will be those watching the British planning experiment with great interest to see if it works or not – or at least which parts of the reform appear to have produced some positive outcomes, whether intended or not. We can only hope that what survives is some of the good work that is undoubtedly already starting to emerge by communities forced to take on roles that the government has abdicated itself from – that of course is what ministers say they always wanted to happen. The difficult choice for ministers now is to hold back from imposing their will against local communities when they choose to take on corporate interests and big government itself in choosing their own paths for future development. We live in interesting times.

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Index

Page numbers in **bold** type refer to figures

Page numbers in *italic* type refer to tables

Page numbers followed by ‘n’ refer to note

Albrechts, L. [85](#)

Allmendinger, P.: and Haughton, G. [1–5](#), [6–24](#), [160–4](#)

Atkinson, H. [105](#)

Bache, I.: and Catney, P. [67](#)

Baker, M.: and Wong, C. [2–3](#), [83–100](#)

Barker, K. [97](#)

Beck, U. [47](#)

Bevan, G.: and Hood, C. [67](#)

Big Society Vanguard Initiative [68](#)

Blair, A. (Tony) [47–8](#)

Brenner, N.: *et al.* [74](#)

Britain *see* United Kingdom

Bromley Hospital: PFI project [54–5](#)

Buck, N.: *et al.* [78](#)

Cable, V. [70](#)

Cameron, D. [42n](#); regeneration [65–79](#)

capitalist accumulation [124](#)

Castree, N. [10](#)

Catney, P.: and Bache, I. [67](#)

challenges: infrastructure [124–7](#)

chance: and infrastructure [126–7](#)

City Deals [72](#)

Clark, G. [72](#)

Clegg, N. [116](#)

CLG HOC Committee [112](#)

Climate Change Acts: (2008) [38](#); (2009) [131](#)

CNDP (France) [137](#)

Coalition Government [4](#), [28](#); Community Infrastructure Levy [36](#); crisis of debt [160–1](#); reform agendas [48](#); reforms [39](#); rescaling strategy [109–10](#)

Cochrane, A. [78](#)

communities [145](#)

Community Infrastructure Levy [36](#)

consensus: urban policy [65–79](#)

Conservative Party [2](#), [28](#), [91](#); *Open Source Planning (OSP)* Green Paper (2010) [6](#), [45](#)

contracts [49](#)

contractualism: new [46–7](#), [48–51](#)

Cowell, R. [2](#), [27–42](#), [145](#)
Cox, E.: and Schmeucker, K. [73](#)
Deas, I. [4](#), [65–79](#)
decentralisation [34](#), [95–7](#)
Decentralisation and the Localism Bill (2010) [4](#), [91](#)
decision making: UK [122–38](#)
Department for Transport [116](#)
devolution [2](#)
Dierwechter, Y. [30](#)
Du Gay, P. [59](#)
Early Intervention Grant (EIG) [77](#)
economic challenges: infrastructure [124–6](#)
Eddington, R. [128](#)
Edwards, C. [49](#)
England: environmental sustainability [27–42](#); Labour Party regional experiment [83–100](#); localist regeneration policy [66–9](#); North West [86](#), [93](#); planning [27–42](#), [91](#); planning framework [87–9](#); planning policy changes [144–6](#); spatial governance [6–24](#); urban regeneration [65](#)
Enterprise Zone (EZ) [24](#); model [70](#)
environmental sustainability [2](#), [27–42](#); conceptual framework [28–31](#)
European Commission (EC) [132](#)
European Union (EU) [29](#)
European welfare states [50](#)
finance: private [51–6](#), *see also* Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
Fourth Planning Report Extra (Vinex) (1990) [147](#)
France [137](#), [151–3](#); neo-liberalisation processes [141–57](#); *Urban Solidarity and Renewal* (1999) [152](#)
Gallent, N.: and Robinson, S. [111](#)
Gamble, A. [60](#)
Geddes, P. [85](#)
Germany [137](#); neo-liberal thinking [148–51](#); neo-liberalisation processes [141–57](#)
Go-Ahead Ltd: *Annual Report* (2010) [57](#)
Go-Via Ltd [56](#)
Goodstadt, V. [97](#)
Gough, J. [9](#)
governance: policy [107–9](#); spatial [6–24](#); Third Way [47–8](#)
Greater Manchester [91](#)
greenfield sites [35](#)
Hajer, M. [85](#)
Harvey, D. [8](#)
Haughton, G.: and Allmendinger, P. [1–5](#), [6–24](#), [160–4](#)
Hawkes, N. [53](#)
Hay, C. [160](#)
health care [51–6](#); South East London politics [52](#)
Heathrow Terminal 5 decision [135](#)
Heseltine, M. [71](#)
Hillier, J. [111](#)
Hood, C.: and Bevan, G. [67](#)
hospitals: PFI projects [54–5](#)
House of Commons Select Committee on Transport [59](#)
housing: New Labour [30–1](#)

infrastructuralism [3](#), [124](#)
infrastructure: challenges [126–7](#); and chance [123–7](#); economic challenges [124–6](#); main elements [130](#);
 planning history [127–33](#); UK reforms [128–33](#)
Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) [129](#), [131–3](#)
institutional structures [47](#)
Integrated Kent Franchise: Franchise Payment Agreement [58](#) investment: social infrastructure [125](#)
Jones, C.: *et al.* [95](#)
Keil, R. [143](#)
Labour government [77](#); English regional experiment [83–100](#)
land-use planning [8](#)
Leeds (UK) [113](#)
Lewisham Hospital: PFI project [54–5](#)
Liberal Democrats [28](#), [41](#)
Local Area Agreements [4](#), [67](#)
Local Authorities [112](#)
Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act (2009) [91](#)
Local Employment Act (1960) [108](#)
Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) [4](#), [45](#), [69–71](#), [73](#), [76–8](#), [96](#), [99](#), [105–7](#); rescaling [113–18](#), [114](#)
Local Government Finance Bill (2011) [72](#)
Local Government Resource Review [71](#)
Local Growth White Paper (2010) [71](#), [144](#)
localism: agenda [73](#); new [1–5](#)
Localism Bill (2011) [45](#), [67](#)
Localism and Decentralisation Bill (2010) [4](#), [91](#)
localist regeneration policy [66–9](#)
London: Heathrow Terminal [5](#)
decision [135](#); South East [52](#), [52](#)
London Underground: privatisation schemes [58](#)
Lovering, J. [1](#)
Lower House [147](#)
Major, J. [108](#)
Manchester (UK) [113](#)
Marine Management Organisation [130](#)
Marshall, T. [3](#), [122–38](#)
Merton rule [33](#)
modernisation [89](#)
Modernising Planning workstream (1997–2000) [135](#)
Monetary Policy Committee [132](#)
Monk, S.: and Whitehead, C. [94](#)
Morphert, J. [91](#)
Mouffe, C. [75](#)
Mumford, L. [85](#)
Murphy, R. [50](#)
National Health Service (NHS) [51–2](#)
National Infrastructure Directorate (NID) [132](#)
National Infrastructure Plan [97](#), [137](#)
National Networks [131](#)
National Planning Framework (NPF) [133](#), [134](#)
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) [28](#), [35](#), [41](#), [45](#), [117](#), [131](#)
National Planning Statements [37](#)

National Policy Statements (NPSs) [38](#), [129–31](#)
 national responsibilities: LEP role [114](#)
 National Spatial Strategy (NSS) [147](#)
 National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) [69](#), [77](#)
Natural Environment White Paper (2011) [33](#)
 nature protection groups [127](#)
 Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) [110](#)
 neo-liberal thinking: Germany [148–51](#)
 neo-liberalisation: accounts [7](#); processes [141–57](#)
 neo-liberalism [8](#), [9–11](#), [141](#); planning [10](#); temporal variegation [10–13](#)
 Netherlands [137–48](#); *Fourth Planning Report Extra* (Vinex) (1990) [147](#); neo-liberal thinking [146](#);
 neo-liberalisation processes [141–57](#)
 new contractualism [48–51](#)
 New Homes Bonus (NHB) [36–7](#), [72](#), [112](#)
 New Labour [128](#), [135](#); devolution [2](#); housing [30–1](#); Panglossian [34](#)
 New Localism [1–5](#), [73](#)
 Newman, P. [85](#)
 Northern Ireland [89](#)
 Northern Way (2004) [90](#)
 Northwest Europe: experiences [145–54](#)
Open Source Planning (OSP) Green Paper (2010) [6](#), [45](#)
 opportunity structures [29](#)
 Othengrafen, F.: Sykes, O. and Waterhout, B. [141–58](#)
Oxford English Dictionary: contract definition [49](#)
 Paddison, R. [75](#)
 Parish Councils [110](#)
 Peck, J. [11](#); and Theodore, N. [10–11](#); and Tickell, A. [11](#), [143](#)
 PFI *see* Private Finance Initiative (PFI)
 planning [27–42](#), [91](#); conceptual framework [28–31](#); framework [87–9](#); infrastructure history [127–33](#);
 land-use [8](#); neo-liberal [10](#); neo-liberalisation [10–13](#), [13–23](#); as neoliberal spatial governance [14–18](#);
 place (health care) [51–6](#); policy changes [144–6](#); regional [84–6](#); rescaling [104–18](#), [110–13](#);
 rescaling regions [113–15](#); shifting scales [21–3](#); strategic [115–16](#); strategic spatial [84–6](#); trend
 comparison in Europe [154–7](#); UK reforms (May 2010) [31–9](#)
Planning Act (2008) [37](#)
Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) [84](#), [89](#)
Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change (2001) [89](#)
 Planning Inspectorate [37–8](#)
 policy: governance [107–9](#); neo-liberal shifts [143–4](#); programmes [31](#); urban [65–79](#)
 Policy Exchange [76](#)
Policy for the Inner Cities (1977) [77](#)
 Pollock, A. [50](#)
 Prisk, M. (Housing Minister) [162](#)
 private finance [51–6](#)
 Private Finance Initiative (PFI) [3](#), [49](#); Bromley Hospital [54–5](#); Greenwich Hospital [54–5](#); Lewisham
 Hospital [54–5](#); UK repayments [50](#)
 privatisation: London Underground [58](#); welfare state [45–61](#)
Programme for Government (2010) [109](#)
 public government: neo-liberal shifts [143–4](#)
 Public Service Agreement [77](#)
 public transport [56–9](#)

Pugalis, L.: and Townsend, A. [4](#), [104–18](#)
Purcell, M. [143](#)
Raco, M. [3](#), [45–61](#)
Randstad Urgent Program [148](#)
Reade, E. [30](#)
Reagan, R. [146](#)
reforms [60](#); UK infrastructure [128–33](#); UK planning (May 2010) [31–9](#); welfare [57–8](#)
regeneration: Cameron [65–79](#); localist policy [66–9](#); urban [65](#), [74–7](#)
Regional Assemblies (RAs) [105](#)
Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) [106](#)
regional experiment: English [83–100](#)
Regional Growth Fund (RGF) [70](#)
regional planning [84–6](#)
Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) [86](#)
rescaling strategy [109–10](#)
responsibilities: national and LEP role [114](#)
Review of sub-national economic development and regeneration (SNR, 2007) [109](#)
Robinson, S.: and Gallent, N. [111](#)
Royal Commission on Environmental
Pollution [39](#)
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) [4](#), [84](#)
Sager, T. [143](#)
Sarkozy, N. [152–3](#)
Schmeucker, K.: and Cox, E. [73](#)
Scotland [89](#), [133–5](#)
Scottish Nationalist Party (SNP) [135](#)
social infrastructure: investment [125](#)
South East London: health care politics [52](#); PH spending [52](#)
South London NHS Trust [52](#)
Southeastern Ltd [56](#)
Spain [137](#)
spatial governance [6–24](#)
state spatial projects [12](#)
Stern, N.: Report (2006) [126](#)
strategic planning [115–16](#)
strategic spatial planning [84–6](#)
Sunday Telegraph [52](#)
sustainability: environmental [2](#), [27–42](#)
Sustainable Communities Plan (2003) [90](#)
Sustainable Development Commission (2007) [137](#)
Swyngedouw, E.: *et al.* [143](#)
Sykes, O.: Othengrafen, F. and Waterhout, B. [141–58](#)
Tax Increment Financing (TIF) [72](#)
Thatcher, M. [146](#), [161](#)
Theodore, N.: and Peck, J. [10–11](#)
Third Way Approach [12](#)
Third Way governance [47–8](#)
Tickell, A.: and Peck, J. [11](#), [143](#)
Townsend, A.: and Pugalis, L. [4](#), [104–18](#)
transport: public [56–9](#)

United Kingdom (UK): in comparative perspective [137–8](#); decision making [122–38](#); infrastructure reforms [128–33](#); land-use planning [8](#); May 2010 Planning Reforms [31–9](#); PFI repayments [50](#); spatial planning [3](#)

United States of America (USA) [12](#)

Urban Development Corporations (UDCs) [9](#), [13](#), [19](#), [75–6](#)

urban policy: consensus [65–79](#)

urban re-generation: post-politics policy [74–7](#)

urban regeneration [65](#); localism [69–74](#)

urban regeneration policy [69–74](#)

Urban Solidarity and Renewal (France, 1999) [152](#)

Vinex (Netherlands 1990) [147](#)

Wales 42n, [89](#)

Waterhout, B.: Othengrafen, F. and Sykes, O. [141–58](#)

Watkins, C.: and Wong, C. [97](#)

welfare reform: and Third Way [47–8](#)

welfare state: European [50](#); privatisation [45–61](#)

Whitehead, C.: and Monk, S. [94](#)

Wolmar, C. [59](#)

Wong, C.: and Baker, M. [2–3](#), [83–100](#); and

Watkins, C. [97](#)

World War: First (1914–18) [128](#)

Yeatman, A. [46–7](#)

Your Region Your Choice White Paper (2002) [90](#)