Urban Development Machines, the New Localism, and Privatisation of Community Engagement in the UK

Abstract

This paper draws on the example of development politics and planning in London's South Bank to examine wider trends in the governance of urban policy in contemporary cities. It assesses the impacts and outcomes of new localist reforms and argues that we are witnessing two principal changes. First, we claim that there has been a move towards the privatisation of community participation in the planning of major development organised and managed by an evolving and under-researched consultancy sector. Private companies no longer simply deliver public services under contract. They now organise and shape community inputs into the planning process in ways that are traditionally associated with public sector planning practice. Second, we show that reforms to the planning system have helped to create 'development machines' in cities characterised by new assemblages of public and private sector experts. Through the mobilisation of these machines there is a greater emphasis on a pragmatic, 'realistic' politics of delivery, that is operationalized through compartmentalised and managerial governance arrangements. We suggest that the implications of these changes for processes of local democracy have been under-discussed. Much contemporary writing still focuses on state strategies and plans as though these alone shape practices and outcomes on the ground. The discussion explores, empirically, the nature of these new governance arrangements and how they operate at the urban scale. It focuses in on the connections between these machines and local residential and business communities and the ways in which local demands are channelled in and through channels of private expertise.

Introduction

The governance of planning and urban development in contemporary cities has been under-going systematic reform. In the wake of austerity cut-backs there has been a renewed emphasis on finding alternative ways to implement development projects that draw on the resources and competencies of different actors. In England, this rationale has underpinned recent *new localist* reforms under which powers and responsibilities are ostensibly being transferred from government bodies to local communities and active citizens. The Coalition government has produced new legislation such as the *Localism Act 2011* and a simplified *National Planning Policy Framework* to enshrine these new principles. Others such as voluntary organisations, faith communities, friendly societies, co-operatives and social enterprises, have been encouraged or required to take greater responsibility for policy making and implementation in the place of state organisations. A dominant consensus has emerged that equates good policy-making with the local scale or the 'natural' scales at which the majority of everyday urban encounters take place. Solutions to development problems are to be found here, by 'rebalancing activity from centrally-led to locally-led action and from public to the voluntary and private sectors' (DCLG, 2012: p.2). This localisation 'logic' has been accompanied by significant cuts of up to a third in central government grants to local authorities, particularly those in urban areas (see Trust for London, 2013).

At the same time, however, a series of longer-running modernisation reforms are having a transformative effect on the conduct of local politics and the relationships between urban places and global capitalism. In this paper we draw on the writings of James Ferguson (1994) to argue that in cities such as London anti-political *development machines*, or assemblages of public and private sector organisations, have co-evolved with localist policy discourse and now dominate the politics surrounding major developments in English cities. The rollout of modernising reforms, such as those linked to the new localism, *appear* to indicate an expansion of local ownership and control. However in reality reforms have been accompanied by the emergence of an *expert-led governance system* that is dependent upon, and facilitates, new assemblages of public and private sector in the form of what we term 'development machines' .These machines exist to push through development of a particular kind as quickly as possible, and are made possible by specific extensions of state power through new regulatory requirements on local actors, which are formalised through legally-binding arrangements and contracts. We argue that the existence of development machines reflects the emergence of a 'realistic' politics of the possible (*cf.* Ranciere, 2005) that calls for a new type of urban politics built on the principles of effective urban management and governed by private sector 'experts' (see Raco, 2014).

We use the example of London's South Bank to show how this new localism is operating in practice and the extent to which expert-led development machines co-ordinate and manage local governance arrangements including democratic inputs and deliberations around the need for, and form of, development. We argue that the wider implications of this shift towards private sector-led managerialism have been under-researched. Consultants and other experts operate in liminal governance spaces between private markets and the formal planning system. Because of this little is known about their input into various planning tasks and requirements, including community consultation; their ethical and professional codes of conduct; organisational capacities, skills, and personnel; and their impacts on planning outcomes. The scale of consultant involvement in urban governance also remains under-discussed, with the majority of research still focussed on planning as something that is solely undertaken by state institutions and bureaucrats. The incorporation of private actors into systems that are tasked with servicing the public interest has ramifications for broader understandings of democratic legitimacy and authenticity. In some instances, private firms,

working under contract for a property developer or local authority, act as the interface between citizens, communities, and the planning system. This is particularly common in large and contentious urban development schemes, in part as a result of legislative reforms to the English planning system that handed responsibility for community consultation to developers in schemes in certain cases (HM Government, 2008). The paper considers the implications of this way of working for planning and reflects upon some of the likely outcomes of new localist reforms. It argues that the role of government is being fundamentally re-shaped in ways that are barely acknowledged in legislative discourses or in much of the policy and academic literature.

The discussion begins with an examination of the co-evolution of development machines and the development planning system seen in recent decades. It highlights some of the implications of these changes for urban politics and, in particular, democratic engagement. We then turn to the South Bank case. We begin by giving a brief overview of development trends and histories in the area, before exploring contemporary development politics through the example of the Shell Centre redevelopment. The section examines the recruitment of private actors to manage the community engagement process and their influence on governance processes and outcomes. We show that the primary purpose of development machines is to convert 'messy' places, such as the South Bank, into managed spaces that can be used to facilitate further inward investment and spin-off development, according to particular developmental logics. There is little interest in what lies beyond the direct responsibilities of the machine (*cf.* Ferguson, 1994). It is up to others, such as local government and 'active citizens' (if interested), to consider such issues. There is also a clear trend towards the containment of political opposition and its mainstreaming into a 'realistic' form of pro-development politics. In the conclusions we highlight some of the implications of our findings for understandings of urban politics and set out an agenda for future research. We argue that a system of expert-led governance is undermining the local empowerment agenda contained within the new localism. Researchers need to develop greater awareness of these new governance modalities in light of their impact upon urban planning, state-community relations, and democratic politics.

The Co-evolution of Development Planning and Development Machines

The New Localism and the Evolution of Development Planning
The planning system in England has traditionally been managed by local government, who, acting as a planning authority, implement statutory frameworks as set by central (national) government. Central-local government relationships have fluctuated since the first *Town and Country Planning Act* of 1947, but, in essence, the system has remained the same, with Planning Approval for development granted by Planning Committees comprised of local elected Councillors acting as the local planning authority. Since the early 1980s, there has been a presumption that the power exercised by local government has decreased, and planning has become a more centralised activity (see Cochrane, 2007). The mid-2000s saw a subtle shift in this trajectory. As part of New Labour's wider project to 'modernise' local government, legislation such as the *Planning Act 2004* called for a more 'integrated' style of planning and positioned local authority planners as mediators of partnership-working at the local level. The message of reform was clear; local authority-led planning was too bureaucratic, old-fashioned and out of touch with the new realities facing modern societies and economies and was acting as an impediment to economic growth in a context of increasing global competitiveness (see Blair, 2010; Cameron, 2011; Clifford and Tewdwr-Jones, 2013). Reforms were needed to enable more pluralistic forms of policy-making that would be driven by local interests working alongside local authorities in an 'enabling' role. This approach was enshrined in the *Planning Act 2008* which, along with other reforms, required those proposing major development schemes to produce a dedicated Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) as

a part of their Planning Applications. SCIs now sit alongside a myriad of other technical documents[3] that are designed to show how a specific development proposal would help improve the well-being of an area and how any negative impacts will be mitigated.

Under the Coalition government (2010-present), this process of modernisation has gone further. The passing of the *Localism Act 2011* was designed to extend the decentralisation of power from central to local government, and then further again down to local communities, neighbourhoods and even individual citizens. In place of state agencies, voluntary organisations, faith communities, friendly societies, co-operatives and social enterprises are encouraged to take over functions traditionally associated with local government. Communities have been given the powers to draw up Neighbourhood Plans, that can include a development plan stipulating where new homes and offices should be built (see Shaw and Blackie, 2013). Once adopted following a local referendum where a majority must vote in favour of the plans, local planning authorities may refuse to grant approval for development proposals that contradict Neighbourhood Development Plans. While a presumption in favour of (*sustainable) development* is now enshrined in national planning policy (see DCLG, 2012), mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Planning brought in under the localism agenda mean that gaining local support for development has become even more pressing. In short, obtaining planning permission is a 'problem' in need of a 'solution', with the local scale now the source of considerable risk and uncertainty for developers.

The localism agenda is underpinned by the belief that, rather than controlling agendas from the top-down, planning and development should be constituted through the *co-evolution and co-production* of interventions between public actors and citizens (see Giddens, 2007). And yet, as we will show, the shift to localism has, in practice, opened up numerous opportunities for the mobilisation of expert knowledge and power, much of which is derived not from civil society but rather from the private sector. There is a mismatch here between the academic and policy ideas that were used to justify reform and some of the outcomes. For instance, notions of collaborative planning and communicative action that underpinned planning theory and policy thinking in the 1990s and 2000s drew explicitly on imaginations of planners as expert mediators, whose task was to interact with a variety of lay voices in order to co-produce more effective and efficient policies and programmes (see Forrester, 2009; Healey, 2007; Innes, 2008). There was little discussion of the role of *consultants* and other private experts in shaping community interactions and embedding their professional knowledge into decision-making processes. Vague notions of 'partnership-working' were used to explain how and why non-state actors should be involved in the formulation of planning decisions. These discussions were (and arguably continue to be) framed in terms of clear separations and divisions between different actors, with the assumption that they could work together collaboratively (see for example Bailey, 1995; Hastings, 2000). There appears to have been little or no anticipation, within such literature, that governance processes themselves might undergo wide-scale privatisation and that new hybrid assemblages would emerge in which private experts would not only act as partners but would also *co-produce* policy programmes and shape the

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[3] According to the *Guidance on information requirements and validation* (DCLG, March 2010) and the *New Planning Practice Guidance* (DCLG, March 2014) the mandatory documents required in a Planning application must comply with both the national and local planning requirements. Therefore, any Planning application would normally consist of: a) the standard application form, a location plan, a site plan, an ownership certificate, an agricultural holdings certificate, a design and access statement, the correct application fee; and b) the documents that each local authority requires according to the type of application, i.e. household, full, outline, etc. If a planning application falls within the 'major development' category (as defined by the local planning authority), a Statement of Community Involvement must also be included as part of the required documentation.

regulatory structures that often open up new market opportunities. For example, the idea that as a result of state-led reforms to the planning system private actors would take responsibility for the mediation of citizen engagement seemed a distant prospect. Moreover, the possibility that the planning system would facilitate development, as it has always done, *and* constitute an important market for private capital accumulation itself, seldom featured in discussions of reform.

Despite the rhetoric of co-production, pluralism, and localism seen in the planning field since the mid-1990s, we argue that the structures surrounding development planning have been transformed into a machine that is largely designed to ensure the rapid delivery of projects. Figure 1 outlines, in schematic terms, the organisational structure of the planning process associated with major development schemes. It shows that there are three principal stages; It shows that there are three principal stages we summarise as: a) Pre plan-making stage; b) Plan-making stage; c) Submission and Review stage. In each of these stages there are a number of clearly defined tasks that need to be carried out (and be *seen* to be carried out) in order for an application to gain local Planning Approval. Planning authorities are also required to consider the economic 'viability' of a proposal, as well as a scheme's likely contribution to a series of (loosely-defined) sustainable development goals (see McAllister et al., 2013). This type of *compartmentalisation* replicates private sector project management structures and opens up the planning process to inputs from a range of private companies whose 'expertise' is sold on the basis that it is directly targeted towards achieving specific outcomes and meeting particular client needs (see Davies and Mackenzie, 2014). It is an approach that eschews relational and/or holistic forms of thinking and instead sees the governance of planning as a process that can be broken down into manageable, realistic, and, ultimately deliverable, tasks.

[Insert figure 1 here]

The managerial structure has co-evolved with the expansion of specialist consultants, and is underpinned by a broader conventional political wisdom; that experts drawn from the private sector possess the skills and competencies to govern in ways that go beyond the skills sets of politicians and local authority planners. On the one hand, this has fuelled the expansion of multinational firms who have tended to specialise in high level activities such as project management and co-ordination. A number of companies with dedicated planning teams now dominate the development field by providing developers with a suite of project management resources that can be purchased under contract to support and facilitate a timely planning approval. The more reputational capital such firms acquire, the greater their chances of writing successful planning applications and acquiring subsequent business. On the other hand, the compartmentalised nature of regulatory requirements also creates opportunities for smaller firms who are able to provide bespoke services that are tailored to particular places and/or services. Some of these companies may bring in-depth local knowledge and specialist experience to bear upon development debates. It is worth noting that, following the budget cuts to local government seen since 2010, many of these consultancies have been set up by, or employ, former public sector employees who bring their contacts, networks and understandings of how to operate in the 'public realm' with them (see Gunn and Vigar, 2012).

The use of expert governance has even been extended to democratic deliberations. Citizen engagement has become something that can be isolated, bounded, and managed as part of a compartmentalised process of decision-making. The submission of SCIs, for example, has opened up community engagement practices to private sector input with applicants required to demonstrate how local residents and others will benefit from a

major proposed intervention as well as how local community views have been taken into account in a development proposal. Traditional notions of community activism and engagement are being replaced by a system of co-option that bears the hallmarks of a (stage) managed process with the focus on delivery, but which is often badged using the discourse of localism. In Offe's (2009) terms, planning reform can be seen as part of a 'state-organised unburdening of the state' in which,

'auxiliary forces within civil society according to their specific competences and resources, are being recruited for cooperation in the fulfilment of public tasks, become subject to regulatory oversight and economic incentives, and are thus licensed to privately exercise (previously exclusive) public functions' (p.54).

Planning is not the only sector that is subject such reforms, with state-led privatisation programmes now progressing through a broad range of related state activities including health care, education, and transport (see Crouch, 2011; Hall and Bierstekker, 2002; Raco, 2014; for a wider discussion). The consequence of these changes, in cities such as London, is the emergence of a development politics that is framed less by the principles of collaborative planning or localised control and more by the emergence of what we term 'development machines', to which the discussion now turns.

The Rise of Development Machines
In the 1980s and 1990s James Ferguson (1994) argued that development politics in countries across the world had become dominated by the rise of 'anti-political machines'. These machines consisted of hybrid public-private assemblages of national and international actors, working in development-focussed institutional spaces. Through the assemblage and mobilisation of particular representations, knowledge, and managerial modes of policy-making, these machines established the terrains of what development policy should consist of, how it should be governed, and what constituted a successful set of outcomes to policy interventions. Ferguson argued that machines used private expertise to facilitate 'the expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power, side by side with the projection of a representation of economic and social life which denies politics and, to the extent that it is successful, suspends is effects' (*ibid.*, pp.xiv-xv). Selected forms of state unburdening through privatisation coupled with the handing over of responsibility for development to development 'experts' established a form of governance that 'depoliticises everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation' (p.xv). Development machines helped to manufacture, and were in turn nourished by, the 'institutionalised production of certain kinds of ideas' (p.xvi) about places and how development should proceed. They instilled a particular way of working and thinking about planning that shaped both the nature of legitimate inputs of knowledge into the formation of policy agendas as well as the types of outputs that policies should seek to produce.

The rise of these development machines resulted from what Ferguson termed the 'apolitical interventions' of growth-focussed politics that drew upon 'preliminary theoretical rearrangements of a more than usually violent or imaginative kind' (p.73). Particular assemblages of politicians, planners, and private consultants used selective understandings of success and failure to target the 'inefficiencies' of state-led planning systems. Modernisation was equated with the rolling-out of delivery-focussed agendas and modern forms of expert-led governance. It is a mode of thinking that claims that it *is* possible to understand the complexities of places and place politics through the application of 'expertise and reason, explanation and simplification' (Mitchell, 2002: p.34: for a broader discussion see also Metzger *et al.*, 2014; Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014). Organised forms of management allow the messiness of political processes to be simplified and converted into technical

questions or what Rancière (2005) terms a 'politics of the possible' in which political idealism is equated with governance failures and top-down control. The net result is that,

'we no longer believe in promises. We have become realists. Or, in any case, our governments and wise experts have become realists for us. They stick to the 'possible', which precisely does not offer a great deal of possibilities. This 'possible' is made of small things that progress slowly if they are handled with caution by those who know' (p.9).

Ferguson's work has powerful resonances for research on urban development in contemporary cities such as London and understandings of how planning systems are being 'modernised' in the name of efficiency. It sheds light on the processes and structures through which knowledge and ideas about (urban) development are produced and with what effects. Perhaps most significantly, it examines the ways in which development machines are shaped through the application of specific 'technocratic mentalities', or expert-led modes of governance that openly argue that policy-making and implementation is more effective when technical knowledge replaces political deliberations. As Ferguson (1994) noted, part of the power of development machines is in defining that what is deemed 'beyond the scope' of a particular development project. It is up to others, such as state bodies, NGOs, communities, and citizens to take responsibility for the 'wider' impacts that a development project may have, perhaps under the guise of devolved localism. These matters are *not* the concern of experts who undertake their own specialist tasks unencumbered by broader responsibilities and concerns (see also Büsher, 2010; Lattans, 2012; Mete, 2012). Putnam (1976) made a similar argument back in the 1970s, that a *technocratic logic* would gradually colonise whole areas of public policy, particularly those relating to economic development and urban planning. This logic sees compromise and negotiation as the enemy of delivery with lay criticism of expert-led proposals dismissed as a by-product of subjective, vested interests and ignorance. Conflict is presented as, at best, misguided and at worst contrived. It should be replaced by 'pragmatic' forms of apolitical decision-making. Moreover there is little interest in distributive questions or concerns over social justice, issues that our research also indicates are increasingly outside of the growth-focussed mentalities that dominate contemporary development politics.

Such characterisations of how development politics works open up a range of research questions and potential approaches for contemporary work on development politics. As writers such as Bevir (2013) argues, all forms of expertise are operationalised in and through specific practices and contexts of action, making them subject to variation and diversity. Experts have to be understood as reflexive social actors whose views of particular problems and contexts will depend upon a complex mixture of subjective interpretations and technical competences (see Latour, 2007; Pieridies and Woodman, 2012). It cannot be assumed *a priori* that private actors will always act on behalf of their clients and simply play a legitimating role for developers' proposals. Expert engagement is anything but 'objective' and as with all forms of political action it is incomplete and subject to unintended consequences and disruption. For example, consultants' activities may, in some circumstances, help to create new awareness of the impacts of regeneration projects and help citizens to establish grounds on which to challenge or resist developments. Private consultants may also adhere to their own progressive ethical standards and act as though they are formally independent from their paymasters. This may be particularly true where staff are drawn mainly from public service backgrounds or have worked in firms with a strong commitment to community engagement (see Gunn and Vigar, 2012).

The paper now turns to look at the example of regeneration in London's South Bank neighbourhood. It draws on research that was conducted in the area between January and July 2013 and which focussed on the

role that private consultants play in the planning process associated with major development schemes. The discussion centres on a significant project, the re-development of the Shell Centre, an iconic tall building developed originally in the 1960s and located next to Waterloo Rail Station. A systematic analysis was carried out of the scale and character of the private sector consultancies involved in shaping the Shell Centre planning application and, in particular, managing community engagement for the developer. This involved documentary analysis of the organisations' key characteristics (obtained through Companies House records, websites, Annual Reports and Statements), and the documentation associated with the scheme's planning application. This exercise was supplemented by 5 semi-structured interviews each of between 30 minutes and 1.5 hours in length that were conducted with representatives drawn from across the consultancy, local government, development and community sectors[4]. The intention was to build up a picture of which companies were involved in the planning process, how they operated, and what effects their actions had on the progression of proposals through the planning application system. In the next section we outline some of the key characteristics of the South Bank area. We then explore the detailed findings through an analysis based on three chronological periods: consultant recruitment, community engagement, and project outcomes.

Managing Development in London's South Bank and the Rise of the New Localism

From the Wrong Side of the River to a Place Fit for a World City: The Transformation of London's South Bank
The case study selected for the empirical discussion is the South Bank, London (see Figure 2). The 160hectare neighbourhood lies immediately to the south of the River Thames in central London and is characterised by a diverse set of land uses. It is home to a residential population of 9,675, as well as international business headquarters such as the riverside Shell Centre, cultural organisations including the National Theatre, and smaller businesses, shops and offices that are located in and around Waterloo, one of the UK's busiest railway stations (GLA, 2011a). The neighbourhood boundary shown in Figure 2, which follows a number of arterial route-ways and cuts across two local authority jurisdictions, reflects the operational area of an employer-led partnership (South Bank Employer's Group) which has delivered a number of local regeneration schemes since the early 1990s. The same boundary features in planning policy, including in a recent application for Neighbourhood Planning Forum status that is being led by the same group of local employers (see London SE1 News, 2013a).

The South Bank has long occupied a precarious position in the imagination of planners and politicians, many of whom have described it as an 'under-developed' place not 'befitting' of its location in central London (see Street, 2012). Since the beginning of the 20th century, planners have sought out opportunities to 'bring it into line' with areas such as the City and West End located to the north of the river Thames (see, for example, Abercrombie and Forshaw, 1943; GLDP, 1969). As a result, the South Bank has been the subject of numerous regeneration schemes. In recent years, planning policy has been instrumental in transforming the area into a major commercial and cultural 'growth zone'. The neighbourhood is now one of London's most popular destinations for overseas visitors and is considered an important space as planners look to support and retain London's global city status (GLA, 2004; 2011; SBP, 2010). The South Bank's designation as one of 28 'Opportunity Areas' suitable for more intensified development, including tall buildings, has had a tangible physical impact upon the form of the local built environment, as well, less tangibly, in the way the area is perceived in both policy and popular imaginations (see GLA, 2004; 2011b).

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[4] To protect the anonymity of our interviewees, institutional affiliations have been defined deliberately broadly.

[Insert figure 2 here]

Like much of inner London, local land ownership and governance arrangements are complex. The London Boroughs of Lambeth and Southwark share administrative responsibilities for the area with ancillary services provided by a number of private and third sector organisations who operate area management services such as street cleaning, and are closely involved in the planning and delivery of regeneration schemes (see sbeg.co.uk). The plethora of non-governmental bodies in the locality is, in part, a result of a perception that the two local authorities have failed to deliver the right types of development to take advantage of the area's valuable central London location (see Street, 2012). The South Bank's active citizen and business-community has produced a relatively well-informed and politically-active local population, that, as we will show, represents a particular challenge for those looking to bring forward major development schemes in the area.

The remainder of the paper explores the ways in which differing conceptions of the South Bank's future are being managed by those acting on behalf of developers looking to capitalise on the area's current status as part of the 'prime' central London property market (*London SE1 News*, 2013b). We show that it is an area that is ripe for the application of new modes of development planning and the mobilisation of public-private development machines. Notions of globally-funded 'opportunities', state-led planning failures, and the need for new governance arrangements that simplify development processes have been used to justify the rolling out of a more output-focussed development politics. In so doing, we focus on the role that private consultancy firms are playing in steering development proposals through this 'risky' local scale and wider planning system. We focus this analysis on one of the South Bank's most significant development proposals, the Shell Centre redevelopment scheme. Royal Dutch Shell was one of a handful of pioneer firms, who, 'pushed' by rising rental rates and space shortages in the City and West End of London, began to locate their offices on the South Bank during the 1960s and 70s. Opened in 1963, the Shell Centre originally consisted of two separate buildings, 'Upstream' and 'Downstream', located on a 7.5acre site. At 27 storeys high, the 'Upstream' building was, at the time, London's tallest building. While the 'Downstream' building was sold during the 1990s and converted into residential use, the Shell Centre remains a commanding presence on the South Bank. The current owners of the Shell site, the property developers and investors Canary Wharf Group and Qatari Diar, have recently been awarded planning permission for a regeneration scheme which involves a major reconstruction and expansion of the existing Shell Centre.

Enhancing Waterloo's role as a gateway to London: The Shell Centre Dialogue process
As explained in the previous section, reforms to the development planning system have opened up opportunities for new assemblages of actors to push for a 'growth logic' in the South Bank that aims to turn it into an area of intensified commercial and cultural development. This logic is deeply embedded in the statements that were produced to support the planning application for the Shell Centre redevelopment. These documents draw upon policies in the London Plan and the Lambeth Development Framework to justify the need for and suitability of this type of development. The developer for the £300 million redevelopment is Braeburn Estates, a joint venture between Canary Wharf and Qatari Diar (see *BLL Construction News*, 2013). The scheme was granted planning permission by Lambeth Council in May 2013.[5] Construction is expected to

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[5] Lambeth's decision to approve the redevelopment was called in by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, in September 2013 following concerns about its impact on the Westminster World Heritage site. A 3-week public inquiry was held where various aspects of the scheme, such as levels of affordable housing and open space provision, which informed Lambeth's decision to approve the scheme were scrutinised. Following an Inspector's report, in June 2014 Pickles recommended the permission should stand. However, in July

take up to 5.5 years and will see the existing 27storey Shell tower retained along with additional office, retail and residential provision for around 800, mainly high-value homes, located in eight new buildings and basements.

The development vision for the scheme is expressed via a specially-designed website (see: shellcentredialogue.com). Branded as the 'Shell Centre Dialogue', the site content mirrors the policy language of 'opportunity'. It was designed by, Soundings, a consultancy employed by Braeburn to manage the public engagement for the scheme and who describe themselves as 'the community engagement experts' on their website (see: soundingsoffice.com). The developer's vision is that the new Shell Centre will:

- Help to build employment in the area;
- Support the area's cultural offer;
- Ensure that the South Bank and Waterloo becomes even more of a destination in the centre of London;
- Create new, dynamic and mixed use spaces which complement and continue the trend of recent developments in the South Bank.

The regeneration benefits it is claimed the redevelopment will deliver are detailed in the Planning Statement which was written by a major multinational consultant that specializes in the assemblage, organization, and management of development plans and capacities (QUOD, 2012). 'Benefits' include the retention of 6,000 jobs on the South Bank 're-asserting Lambeth's position in the central London office market, and providing significant business rates' (p.4). Additional financial benefits are also noted such as a promise of New Homes Bonus payments 'equating to an additional £9.4 million over six years for Lambeth to spend on council priorities', as well as a 'contribution of £9.7 million in additional household and £5.9 million employee spending to the local economy' (*ibid*, p.5). In addition to these economic incentives, the document emphasizes the 'softer' outcomes of the redevelopment, such as the provision of 'new activities and animation in the area' (*ibid*, p.5). New shops and services will 'complement Waterloo's existing offer and can draw additional expenditure to the area', while multi-million pound investment in sports and leisure provision, education, health and transport will be generated by the scheme's Section 106 agreement[6]. It is noted that this 'will have significant regeneration benefits for Waterloo and consolidate Shell's presence on the Site' (*ibid*, p.5).

Figure 3 shows the actors that were involved in gaining planning consent for the Shell Centre scheme and presents a visual representation of the development machine that has been mobilized to undertake the project. The diagram indicates the level of compartmentalization that now exists in the management, financing, and delivery of development projects. Major property developers are acting as organizers of development by assembling experts and using them to define the contours of the development plans and the governance arrangements through which they are delivered. They have hired major multinational corporations, such as QUOD and DP9, to undertake masterplanning for the site and to co-produce and co-manage the overall development machine. Alongside them a number of smaller, more focused, expert consultancies have been hired to provide bespoke inputs. Together these companies cover the full range of knowledge and skills

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2014, a local resident, George Turner, began High Court proceedings arguing that the decision to award planning approval was flawed on a number of grounds (see WCDG.net).

[6] Planning obligations, contained under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1997, exist to mitigate the impact of a development on a community, for example by securing developer contributions to community facilities or local infrastructure.

needed to meet the complex regulatory requirements of the planning system. Collectively they constitute a formidable machine, capable of generating powerful representations of the area and what it 'needs' in terms of development initiatives. As will be discussed below, these logics have not gone unchallenged, but the huge input of resources arguably makes it difficult to either prevent or change in any meaningful way development plans.

[Insert figure 3]

The assemblage of development machines, such as that found in the South Bank, represents the logical consequence of a project-centred localism built on expert inputs and the simplification of a complex local context into a management framework. We focus the remainder of the discussion on the mechanisms through which local community engagement has been incorporated into this machinery through the actions of private consultants. We focus on Braeburn's commissioning of Soundings to produce a 'robust' SCI that will help to convert local (political) demands into a series of minor amendments to the overall development scheme that will not threaten the overall scope, scale and type of development. We show how Soundings effectively acts as an interface between the development machine, local authority planners, and local citizens/businesses in conducting this task.

The contracting-out of community engagement
From the outset, those organizing the development machine were aware of the 'risks' associated with a potentially controversial development. A re-branding exercise was undertaken that saw the machine adopt the name 'Braeburn', a variety of apple, in order to disguise the true ownership and sources of international funding behind the project. This was because there were concerns that Qatari Diar's associations with earlier projects such as the Canary Wharf scheme, with its widely publicized difficulties over community engagement, might create tensions with local community groups in the South Bank. The new organization, Braeburn, would approach development planning in a different way that, as an interviewee explained, "*was always sensitive in their approach to developing the conceptual scheme in consultation with community*". Even if this consultation, as one respondent conceded, was only ever on the basis that "*we were always clear that [we] were there to make a profit in a capitalist society…and seek to maximise returns under planning rules*".

The small consultancy Soundings was recruited by the developer with a particular task in mind; to undertake community engagement for the scheme and to produce the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), necessary to support the planning application for this type of 'major development'[7]. Soundings exemplify the type of organisation that is emerging to fill the compartmentalised spaces of expertise that have been opened up by governance reforms. The company was founded in 2006 and grew from an existing architectural and design practice named Fluid *Ltd*. Fluid specialise in what its owners describe as the 'co-design' of buildings and urban spaces. It was increasingly successful in capturing public and private contracts, such as those that emerged through an earlier round of the New Deal for Communities projects in East London and other urban development projects. The decision to create a new business that specialised in consultation was taken in the

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[7] According to Lambeth's Local Development Framework, and in accordance with section 62A(2) of the 1990 Planning Act, a 'major application' is any development proposal involving one or more of the following features: 10 or more dwellings; residential development on sites of 0.5 hectares and above; non-residential development involving 1,000 square metres or more; or on sites of 1 hectare or above.

light of planning reforms and the broader 'direction' of public policy towards engagement and participation at the local level. Lucrative markets were emerging in the field of consultation with local authorities and developers looking to hire experts of no 'political' persuasion. Architects with expertise in what an interviewee described as "*co-production through design…with a great emphasis on the visual dimension and the active participation of the community in the design process*", can bring an extra dimension to this particular niche. Their role is to canvass local views and convert them into a narrative that is used to support the broader development objectives of clients, via the drawing up of an SCI.

Soundings was hired by the developers in part because of its *reputational capital* and the importance the developer attached to a hiring a company with a proven 'track record' in working in this sensitive arena. As Ferguson (1994) argued, development machines tend to be self-reproducing with networks emerging between companies that learn to 'trust' each other. Soundings had already worked with Qatari Diar on the controversial Chelsea Barracks project, in which consultations had been undertaken with up to 5,000 local residents as well as other stakeholders. The firm quickly established itself during the 2000s as a specialist in the planning of major development projects, such as in King's Cross where it acted as a consultant for the developer, Argent. It has become one of the most experienced firms of its kind and, as such, has come to form part of a new elite set of private companies whose experience can be used to be enhance the perceived quality of engagement both in the view of developers and wider interests, such as local authority planners and citizens. Soundings explicitly promotes itself as a firm that does not engage in public-relations style work to 'sell' developments to local groups, but instead seeks to consult and enable engagement, thereby supporting the development machine in the pursuit of its objectives

Sounding's main role was to legitimate a controversial development. Some interviewees expressed concern that a proposal from Qatari Diar and the Canary Wharf Group would immediately stir up local opposition given that, "[the] *South Bank was a contentious area, with generations of pressure groups and pressure group politics; a difficult area in which to manage development*". The importance of engaging effectively with local residents was also heightened by a feeling that the *Localism Act 2011*, and mechanisms such as Neighbourhood Planning, had made community politics in London more contested, with groups increasingly prepared to make claims on the (future) direction and format of development. While this might seem antithetical to the development machines of the 1980s and 1990s that locked down debate, it illustrates the way in which developmental logics have evolved and taken on new formulations. Development logics today may be no less 'anti-political' in their orientation but are couched in the language of inclusion, local engagement and empowerment. These agendas, with their potential to introduce unpredictable and potentially uncontainable elements into the development system, constitute a threat to developers looking to deliver schemes while protecting their profit margins.

The employment of a specialist company such as Soundings was also a response to the perceived risk of a planning permission decision being subject to judicial review or public inquiry, as was eventually the case in the Shell redevelopment. This is of particular concern in major schemes set within sensitive contexts such as the South Bank where issues such as the impact of any new development on existing historical 'assets' are often fiercely contested. The Greater London Authority issue guidance on the preservation of 'viewing corridors' which aims to protect sites such as as the Palace of Westminster from incursion from new development when viewed from particular parts of the city. In recent years, there have been a series of objections to development proposals led by Westminster City Council and the non-governmental body English Heritage on 'conservation grounds'. This conflictual planning context has been amplified by representations from the global body UNESCO, which has reportedly placed the Palace of Westminster on its critically endangered list of world

heritage sites (see Doward, 2013; Moore, 2012). Add to this the developer's awareness that the South Bank community has historically been a hostile opponent to past redevelopment schemes (see Street, 2012), and it is clear to see why it was so important for Braeburn to be seen to be hiring specialists who would provide quality and robust advice, guidance and outputs that stand up to close scrutiny. As an interviewee noted in interview:

"after the Chelsea Barracks experience, everything [to do] with consultation is done with the possibility or threat of judicial review in mind and ensuring compliance with other statutory requirements…Ensuring [and demonstrating] quality management is important in this respect".

The process of judicial review referred to here describes a legal mechanism that exists to allow anyone (provided that have access to the necessary funds) to subject a decision-making process that they be deemed flawed in its basis to scrutiny via the High Court. The possibility of a planning decision being subject to a JR, or sent for examination in Public Inquiry (as was the case in the Shell redevelopment), is unsurprisingly of concern to developers. By employing external experts on the basis of their 'impartiality' and the quality of their community engagement 'skills', a developer can show a degree of commitment to participation that goes beyond simplistic rhetoric. This can undermine efforts by other interests, such as community organisations or environmental groups, to challenge a development on these grounds. Some have argued that, as a consequence of what they see as the de-politicisation of planning, the legal system is being used by citizens to challenge projects in the absence of more traditional forms of public protest or systems of redress within the political system (see Allmendinger and Haughton, 2011).

Moreover, the use of a specialist expert is perceived to improve the chances of a controversial application overriding opposition *within* local government. A professional and ostensibly 'inclusive' SCI may make a positive impression upon a local authority planning committees as it weighs up the impacts of a development proposal. In places like the South Bank, some of the most significant sources of risk for developers are therefore located at the *local* scale. While this is not necessarily new, in a context of austerity government and the publicly expressed desire of national government to push for development wherever possible (see DCLG, 2012), the presumption is that local authorities will approve development wherever its 'sustainable' nature can be demonstrated. SCIs therefore become another technocratic mechanism through which developers look to gain the acceptance of a potentially sceptical local public, as well as politicians and planning officers by demonstrating that there has been local input into, and support for, their schemes. In Lambeth, this situation has been complicated by the difficulties that the local authority has faced since the 1970s. As an interviewee who has been involved in local politics for several decades commented, the Borough's "*management capacity is frail*"; it is perceived to lack strong leadership and certainty in strategic matters such as planning and regeneration. The consequence is that "*even if the Borough is more pro-development [than in the past] there is no way of delivering this*". It also, however, adds to the political complexity of place, making the management of the politics surrounding planning applications less predictable.

And finally, the developer's decision to employ Soundings demonstrates its faith in the ability of a private consultancy to understand and work with (and within) the complex everyday spaces of urban politics. Soundings, as with some of the other firms employed by Braeburn, promotes itself as a London-based company with the relevant knowledge and skills to work with developers and communities across the city. However, it had not previously worked in the South Bank and thus had little in-depth knowledge of the area, although, with its reputation as a place where residents' have historically fought off development proposals, it is likely that this informed its approach to community engagement. Indeed, mindful of the contested nature of

development and planning, specialist engagement companies stress their ability to deploy engagement techniques that allow them to successfully manage community objectives and expectations. Through the deployment of management tactics and technologies, the assumption is that a 'difficult' political place can be tamed and converted into a development space. The following section now examines the tactics and technologies used to engage with the South Bank's local community.

The Practices of Engagement in the South Bank and the Outcomes of Deliberations
Soundings implemented a wide-ranging engagement plan for the Shell Centre redevelopment. From November 2011-May 2012 it consulted over 1,000 local businesses and residents. It undertook a range of activities including interviews, focus groups, door-dropping, mailouts, meetings and visual engagement exercises. It launched a 5-stage review process that included: (i) establishing local aspirations and views; (ii) drafting a provisional Masterplan that would build on the developers' proposals; (iii) developing a final Masterplan and design proposal following the process of engagement; (iv) engaging in statutory consultation as required under the Planning legislation; and (v) establishing post-application outreach so that respondents would be made aware of how their inputs had had an impact on policy decisions and outcomes.

This activity is summarised in the SCI, a two-part document that spans 208 pages in total, with an additional 235-page appendix that is brought together under the title of the 'Shell Centre Dialogue' (Soundings 2012abc). The use of the term dialogue, suggestive of a two-way knowledge exchange or discussion, is indicative here. In describing its approach to community engagement, Soundings consciously adopts the language of realistic politics, portraying itself as something akin to a modernised and responsive state body. As an interviewee commented, the company sees its role as creating innovative, participatory democratic structures and building sustainable and effective forms of governance:

"*We see ourselves as a mere 'platform' for the community to speak up or mere 'facilitators' between the developer and the community. We make a real effort on creating trust and we see engagement as a realistic and real process rather than a tick-box exercise*".

The creation of trust is one way in which private sector actors can deal with what Justice and Skelcher (2009) term the democratic 'design problems' that face those bodies that operate at the interface between public and private spheres. Soundings, in adopting a community-facing role, is playing its part in a system of urban governance in which the state acts through 'intermediary organizations' to deliver 'public purpose' (*ibid*, p.738). Emphasising its 'public sector-like' characteristics is one way in which Soundings has sought to generate legitimacy for its activities amongst a local community that have been be sceptical, and occasionally openly hostile, towards incoming developments (see Street, 2012). The company is also at pains to emphasise its specialist knowledge and skills in community engagement, things that are increasingly beyond the reach of an over-stretched and under-resourced public sector. The shifting dynamic of consultation is another example of where public sector reforms (and budget cuts) have co-evolved with the emergence of specialist private sector service providers. Soundings' operational ethos reflects this new reality. It emphasises the 'bespoke' inputs into the planning process that it can provide to both public and private sector clients through the deployment of innovative participatory techniques, including the use of visual and participatory technologies. As a statement in the SCI explains:

'At each stage the technique employed to promote the consultation process and its events change according to the best approach agreed with the client team and in consultation with local people' (SCI appendix, p.16).

The claim is that a flexible and proactive approach ensures the development of a masterplan and detailed design that is 'underpinned by local consultation and engagement' (SCI Part 1, p.11). Yet within this, there is a clear caveat that community input can only be accommodated within the boundaries of what is *possible*. As a comment from the developer acknowledges:

'We know that it will not be possible to satisfy everyone. However we have pledged to listen and consider issues carefully and communicate our response to these issues as a result. We hope that this document will provide testament to these intentions' (SCI Part 1, p.11).

The sense here is of the SCI acting mainly as a container for the gathering of views, rather than the kind of dynamic, discursive vehicle for engagement that is suggested by the Soundings team's description of their unique approach.

Nonetheless, the community consultation process did have a tangible influence on the final development plans. Even those sceptical of the techniques used conceded that "*the consultation process did have some impact on the final scheme as the developer was willing to learn about the place and adapt accordingly*". For some, this was less about the modes of consultation *per se*, and more a result of the local community recognising Shell's commitment to occupy the site in the long term. This may have encouraged a positive dialogue in which, as an interviewee commented, there was a genuine "*commitment to producing a good development and [to the] wider area….more so than [if it was] a speculative development*". There was evidence of the developer making certain adaptations to local circumstances. This included concessions over the height of some of the buildings, allowing public access to some of the new spaces created by the development and certain spin-off benefits, including bringing vacant or under-used parts of the site back into use, such as the long-contested Hungerford car park (see Street, 2012). In this sense, the Shell redevelopment exemplifies what some argue is a new feature of development politics in London whereby spaces have been opened up that although 'private' in ownership are 'public' in terms of use (see Carmona and Wunderlich, 2012; Norwood, 2013).

Soundings was also perceived, by some, to have succeeded in other ways. The majority of interviewees noted that community objections to the Shell Centre were relatively muted when compared to other projects on the South Bank or, indeed, elsewhere in London. People had, in the words of one local business representative been "*consulted to death*" over the scheme, which for some closely involved in the development machine, may represent a 'success'. It is not clear whether the community's relatively muted response to this particular development was a result of 'over-consultation', a consequence of Sounding's expertise, or a reflection of a deeper level of acceptance among the community that resistance to development is 'futile 'in a context dominated by development machines made up of powerful public and private sector bodies.

Documentation associated with a Public Inquiry, called by Secretary of State Eric Pickles into Lambeth's decision to approve the redevelopment provides some clues as to why the community resistance to the scheme was relatively muted. One of the key local campaign groups on planning issues, Waterloo Community Development Group (WCDG)[8], adopted what it describes as a 'neutral' position at the inquiry reflecting what it describes as a "very wide range of views from local residents on the merits of the scheme." (WCDG, undated, no page). It goes on: "While there was little doubt that the height and density of the scheme would

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[8] WCDG is the South Bank and Waterloo area's community land planning group. Formed in 1972, the group's remit is to work with local residents to create a sustainable community for the benefit of current and future generations.

be harmful to the local community, the additional homes and jobs were very welcome". This is in contrast to the group's position on previous development schemes which have tended to be much more partisan (see Street, 2012). The community's ambivalent view about the Shell scheme seem to have hinged on an economic argument that, as the WCDG reported: "were the scheme not to go ahead and Shell pull out this could precipitate the loss of all major office development in Waterloo" (*ibid*). This highlights the role that economic arguments play in development politics and the power that discourses of 'development' have when allied to well-resourced expert-led organisations come into play here, It also underlines that, while a compartmentalised planning system is characterised by the demarcation of tasks and responsibilities, it may not be easy to limit or neatly demarcate community and citizen expectations about a development, particularly matters such as the form it should take (height, density, use type etc.).

While the extent to which a community will 'accept' a development is unknowable, in formulating their approach to the consultation process the developer and Soundings were conscious of the boundaries of consultation that existed, much of which they saw as being circumscribed through planning policy. In the words of one interviewee:

"*the London Plan calls for more density in the city centre – due to the clash between Green Belt constraints on the one hand and demands for more space for development on the other….therefore people have to accept that there is little chance of resisting things like tall buildings and views – these are not relevant*".

Such reflections may go some way towards explaining the concerns of one local resident who, at the public inquiry, 'spoke of the manipulative consultation process which had never listened to the criticism of the height of the proposed towers, several of which would be taller than the Shell tower itself' (WCDG, undated, no page). Moreover, although Soundings were keen to ensure that there was feedback to local respondents on the progress of planning decisions after the consultation, the reality has been one of near silence. This is partly because a different group of contractors have now moved in to develop the site also because the need to secure planning permission, one of the main aims of the development machine, has gone. Again as a developer noted, "*all of this is usually lost when development moves on and it is not really the developer's responsibility to keep these things going*".

One recurring difficulty for Soundings and the developers was that, in the words of one experienced local politician, "there is a very clued up local community". The area's contested planning history meant that Soundings' approach was greeted with a degree of scepticism, so that:

"*the formal consultation process…didn't go down that well as residents found it a bit patronising. In other parts of London, like Chelsea Barracks, where the community are not so well informed or practised at engaging in planning issues, Soundings' approach would have probably been a good one to use. But in South Bank…..Soundings' approach didn't strike quite the right note*".

After decades of local disagreement over local development plans it was not easy for an external consultancy to use abstract management techniques to bring 'order' and clarity to local politics as desired. As reflexive and knowledgeable subjects, community members understood how and why consultants had been called in but complained that the local authority had become a "*very distant*" player in debates over the area's development, to the detriment, some felt, of the engagement process. In contrast to the claims of a new realistic politics that complex matters are safest in the hands of non-partisan, technical experts, many local respondents questioned this, and called for *more* government intervention to manage decisions on their behalf. As one community

leader noted in interview, "*we felt that Soundings was just a mediator for the developer and was just doing a tick box exercise rather than a genuine consultation*". Another noted that "*it felt as though the developer just wanted answers to prove that they had consulted and establish some local results*" and, in stronger terms, that the "*residents were left with the feeling that the developer was trying to fool them*". There was particular dissatisfaction amongst some interests over the perceived inequalities in access to policy-making consultations. Representatives of local residents described being treated akin to a 'discussion group', while other major interests such as the operators of local tourist infrastructure were perceived to have a 'direct line' to policy makers and the developers.

Rather than seeing the consultation as a platform for obtaining influence, critics saw it is as a vehicle for the legitimation of the developer's plans. This view was compounded by a frustration with the lack of information over who was leading the development as a consequence of the compartmentalisation of knowledge and responsibilities. In the words of one community representative:

"*it was not always clear who the experts were or what they did and did not do. It was very unclear who Braeburn Estates were to us and who was leading the development. There was never a proper introduction to the different actors involved…we had no idea there was Qatari money behind the project until recently*".

The result was that Shell, as the more readily identifiable 'figure-head' of the redevelopment, shouldered much of the criticism for the plans. The difficulties in demarcating responsibility in light of the level of compartmentalisation was recognised by a community representative who went on to argue:

"*it is difficult for developers to take into account the views of different parties and different requests from residents. Many of the questions they could not answer, saying they were beyond their remit, giving the impression of a very fragmented process*".

There was also criticism that the nature of consultation closed-down opportunities for locals to raise awareness of community needs and concerns. The lack of an integrated government agency overseeing the proposals, coupled with a more general sense that the local authority was taking a back seat role, meant that it was difficult for some stakeholders to identify who had responsibility for what. The outcome was a feeling, in the words of a local resident, that "*it felt as if the developer just wanted answers to prove that they had consulted and established some local results*".

Even in its own terms, the developer's strategy has only been partially successful. The goal was to secure a planning approval, something which involved choreographing and co-ordinating all the different elements of a compartmentalised knowledge system to achieve this aim. Yet the decision to grant planning permission was 'called-in' for review by the Secretary of State. This caused surprise amongst some interviewees who felt confident that they had overcome sources of potential opposition. However, the 'grounds' for the call-in reflects the wider political tensions around building height and visual impact on heritage assets that have emerged over the scheme's impacts beyond the immediate South Bank locality. As such, they were beyond the reach of the developer's control, even though they had done all they could to efficiently put in place a new 'realistic' set of plans. Such examples illustrate some of the limitations of development machines and their boundaries of power and influence.

Conclusions

This paper has drawn on the example of (re)development in London's South Bank to explore the mobilisation of powerful development machines, planning reform, and the new localism that is sweeping through governance discourses across the EU and beyond. It argues that the realities of urban politics are very different from the policy rhetoric of 'holistic' and 'sustainable' planning to be found in many urban strategies and plans. While these (policy) discourse may still be omnipresent, the *structures of decision-making*, are becoming more compartmentalised and separated-out. In many ways, this indicates a return to the development machine models of the 1980s and early 1990s where, in well-known cases such as the Canary Wharf regeneration, politics were 'taken out', in order to focus on the task of project delivery. A new 'technocratic mentality' has come to dominate planning deliberations. It is output-centred, and is framed by a form of managerialism that seeks to turn complex places into profitable development spaces. The expansion of private-led development machines is presented as the only 'realistic option' to deliver the facilities and services that a global city like London 'needs'. Individual developments are treated as bounded interventions in the urban landscape that are best managed by experts and those who 'know' how to govern on behalf of others. Our analysis focuses on how these systems have operated in the case of the Shell Centre redevelopment in the South Bank, but there are numerous other development schemes in London that are likely to tell a similar story. Indeed, a 2012 article reveals that a remarkable 230 major towers have been given separate planning permissions across the city, each driven by a different assemblage of players and machines (see Moore, 2012).

The role of private developers as organisers and managers of governance processes that are increasingly separated out and divided up between specialist consultants, becomes normalised and may eventually be understood as a pragmatic and incontestable 'reality'. Our research indicates that there is a strong belief among developers in the power of skilled and well-resourced technocrats to guarantee 'quality' in development practices and to protect against decisions being overturned through processes of judicial review and public inquiry. In Latour's (2007) terms, governance arrangements have been put in place that prevent 'meddlers' from interfering too much in the process of technical delivery. These meddlers are variously defined as those who have limited knowledge of the complexity and 'realities' of development planning processes, particularly critical citizens and 'lay' actors in state bodies, such as local authorities. The co-production of planning policies envisaged by the new localism is being mediated through these machine-like arrangements. There is little room in these emerging modes of localist planning for local variety and citizen control. The emphasis, instead, is on the mobilisation of external expert knowledge and the conversion of local political relations into a de-politicised, 'common-sense' discussion of how to proceed 'rationally' in the name of progress.

Our case has also shown that the state is playing a direct role in acting as a regulator and approver of these new arrangements, for example by creating a context whereby reforms 'require' developer-led community consultations as a condition of planning approval. Paradoxically, the more it tries to regulate the process from a distance, the more complex, and less manageable, these governance arrangements become. This, in turn, opens up market opportunities for private sector consultants and *de facto* restricts development opportunities to an increasingly limited pool of selected multi-national developers who have co-evolved with state reforms and possess the necessary financial and managerial power to meet new regulatory requirements. Attempts to extend state power through regulation and judicialisation only entrenches this structural power. The emphasis on private sector-led quality comes at an economic cost to developers, although this may be off-set by lucrative future gains (and the benefits that come with securing a 'quick' planning approval). In the South Bank, the pool of developers with the capacity to finance and deliver the project in this complex and contested terrain is limited to a small number of global real estate players. The mobilisation of development machines is a resource-intensive process that has mutated into increasingly hybridised forms (REPETITION?). Despite

the values of inclusivity, empowerment and engagement that the planning system is meant to uphold, there is a sense that decisions are becoming dominated by narrowly demarcated development logics. For politically active citizens looking to challenge or even reframe these logics, progressive possibilities could be located within the Localism Act and other judicial-technical systems.

Or, it could be that, despite the promises of new localism, the expansion in regulatory requirements for development erects more significant barriers between and the critical voices of 'non-experts' and structures of decision-making than it opens up. In establishing 'realistic' terms of reference for community engagement processes, the tendency, certainly as we have observed it in the South Bank case, has been towards the limiting of opposition and the denial of alternative ways of thinking about the area's development as 'unrealistic' and therefore unworthy even of consideration. However, this does not mean that developers are not taking the *prospect* of the political disruptions that might be created by localism seriously. Indeed, the South Bank case shows that developers are mobilising private sector consultants' expertise partly in an attempt to nullify and control local-scale opposition as what we see as a wider reconfiguring of state-local relations. This involves the reorganisation of activities such as local democratic engagement and participation that were previously the preserve of governmental bodies. Indeed, the assumption that the state is still fully 'in control' of these practices continues to underpin much of the teaching and research thinking within the discipline of academic planning (see Tasan-Kok and Oranje, 2013).. This underlines the knowledge gap that this paper has sought, in part, to address; little is known about the consultancy sector that is now engaged in delivering numerous planning-related tasks. We still need to learn more about the types of skills that exist within consultancy firms or the extent to which firms work in a co-ordinated or fragmented manner. Understanding the inner-workings of these actors, who are increasingly mediating citizens' experiences of, and relationships with, the local state, must now be a focus for future research.

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