



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

Progress in Planning

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/pplan



Networks, power and knowledge in the planning system: A case study of energy from waste

Nick Hacking^{a,*}, Andrew Flynn^b

^aWelsh School of Architecture, Cardiff University, Bute Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3NB, Wales, UK

^bSchool of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff CF10 3WA, Wales, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 July 2015

Received in revised form 5 December 2015

Accepted 11 December 2015

Keywords:

Networks
Planning theory
Planning practice
Power
Participation
Incineration
Wales

ABSTRACT

Understanding the nature of power relations has been integral to debates in planning theory and planning practice since the 1960s. Current theoretical approaches to planning and power have evolved to a state of pluralism which impacts upon how planning is conceived of and practiced. We seek to examine power relations and knowledge via a multidisciplinary case study of an energy-from-waste (EfW) development based in South Wales. Centred on a highly contested technology, incineration, this case study incorporates in-depth, longitudinal interview data with social network analysis to build up a picture of competing framings of environmental health risk. In local environmental debates, planners are expected to be able to help resolve competition between conflicting interests and yet, in reality, such conflicts often appear intractable and have long been dubbed wicked problems. This is especially the case for waste management. In our in-depth case study, significant pre-existing power relations existed between the local planning authority (LPA), which was also the lead co-developer in the EfW project, and the local community. In terms of methods, we have been keen to unearth data that allows us to explore the nature of institutional and networked power as it plays out within a community over time. It is our contention that too often the dynamics of power have been underplayed because it is studied as a snapshot rather than over time. Here we have utilised a variety of methods – from key person interviews to social network analysis – to examine the application for development, the operation of the EfW and the closure of the plant – over a ten year time frame. By drawing upon a rich database we can better understand the ways in which, in the case of particularly contentious developments, power relations greatly hampered efforts at public participation. Our nuanced methodological approach reveals empirical evidence for tensions in theoretical approaches to power relations in the planning arena and we can identify how debates can move forward based on a more geographically informed perspective.

© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

In this paper, we focus on power relations, networks and public participation in planning practice. We note how attempts over four decades to boost participation have come from a number of perspectives in planning theory – advocacy, radical/transactive, collaborative and Deleuzian – each based on a critique of prior theory and practice (Davidoff, 1965; Forester, 1989; Friedmann, 1973; Harvey, 1973; Hillier, 2008). Advocates of these perspectives regard power relations as being mediated through state-led national planning systems, and asymmetric differences in power as

responsible, in large part, for negative outcomes in social and environmental terms. Such critiques spurred on and overlap with the environmental justice literature. These critiques and the empirical evidence for them are made via recourse to normative approaches ‘needed’ to overcome the democratic deficits said to be inherent in the planning system (Bullard, 1990; Walker, 2012). Practical change to planning can be achieved by boosting community and individual participation in the planning process. Although this debate started in the 1960s, it still matters today in terms of how planning is conceived of and practiced. Planning theorists and practitioners continue to explore the ontological question of how actors’ perceptions of the world alter under conditions of uncertainty (cf. Christensen, 1985). This theoretical picture suggests planning practice is permeated by power relations.

Getting approaches to public participation right also matters to a profession whose political legitimacy, based on its technical,

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: hackingn@cardiff.ac.uk (N. Hacking), flynnac@cardiff.ac.uk (A. Flynn).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.progress.2015.12.001>

0305-9006/© 2016 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

managerial and political expertise, is continually recast (cf. Rein, 1969). From the public's point of view, hoped-for gains in democratising national planning systems have not diffused at anything like the rate that early proponents of change initially anticipated (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Radical change has not occurred in part because planners deal with 'wicked problems' (Rittel & Webber, 1973). These social policy problems are evidenced in intractable land-use contestations between rival stakeholders. Policy solutions that are dependent upon technical expertise cannot necessarily be found in a 'rational' way by state managers or bureaucrats.

The paper makes a significant contribution to current debates on environmental planning and power. At its heart is a longitudinal case study approach which enables analysis of how debates on development continue after a decision has been made. Power relations are constantly made and remade as actors and networks interact or events move to the fore (such as the granting of a licence to operate). This suggests that actor and networks based on asymmetric power relations remain embedded in communities (cf. Hacking & Flynn, 2014). We offer a theoretical approach to the study of power relations, planning and public participation which suggests that planners need to operate with a variety of theoretical perspectives and approaches given competing claims to knowledge, expertise and power. This avoids being caught in the silo mentality that sometimes exists in planning theory (Rydin, 2007). We use a number of methods to show how power plays out in practice at the community level. For instance, we unpick the competing social constructions of knowledge of different stakeholders in the development using 'sociologic' diagrams (Latour, 1987). These sociologics vividly illustrate how actors relate to one another in networks. This is in terms of the knowledge and resources that actors marshal when seeking to win an argument over whether a proposed energy-from-waste (EfW) plant should be built and how it should be operated. In our case study, participatory efforts failed dramatically because of the high levels of public distrust in governance institutions. The power that was projected into this particular community, via an unwanted development, meant that resistance was inevitable. The community responded in three ways: first, some 'citizen scientists' (cf. Irwin & Wynne, 1996) tried to tackle the development on its own terms; second, some community members pursued direct action; and third, others stood by. In amongst these competing perspectives of disparate interest groups, planners needed to be reflexive about their own role in terms of power relations and how they themselves are a key structure projecting power into the community.

This paper is organised into a further five sections. In Section 2, we outline progressive shifts in paradigmatic thinking on public participation in planning in a thematic review of a directed selection of the literature. We cover three linked areas: evidence and analysis of social critiques, case study examples of social and environmental injustice, and normative suggestions for boosting public participation. Our conclusion from this thematic review is that existing theoretical approaches, which inform current planning practice, remain conflicted and require professional planners to retain a keen critical detachment about the ways they frame their activities (Pløger, 2001, 2004). This review informs our approach to the following sections.

In Section 3, we explain our case study methodology and analytical framework. We make use of sociologics to draw out the perceptions of key actors from Crymlyn Burrows in south-west Wales and the power resources that they draw upon. These map individual actors' knowledge construction and reveal the array of knowledge, procedures and norms that a particular network draws on in its efforts to overcome a rival network. The contestation was about the framing of risk from a contentious technology – the

incineration of mixed waste – since the perception of risk shaped how actors and networks behaved. For example, by imposing a low risk framing on the local community, the developer and regulator worked within narratives that promoted the benefits of EfW and drew upon well-established regulatory processes to legitimise their case. Finally, in this section, we use social network analysis (SNA) with twelve years' of meeting data from the community Liaison Committee of this energy-from-waste (EfW) development. The SNA further illustrates how events and actors interacted. It strengthens our analysis of how power is made and remade at the local level.

In Section 4, we describe the background history of the case study. Crymlyn Burrows is in the borough of Neath-Port Talbot in south-west Wales, in an area which has suffered a long history of environmental degradation. This history is directly linked to a sense of deep mistrust of public bodies by community members and this shaped the community response to incineration technology. The facility, the Materials Recovery and Energy Centre (MREC), was announced in 1998. Debate, albeit much more muted, continues in the present well after the facility was licensed in 2002. A distinctly asymmetric set of power relations between three networks – the regulator, the developers, and community and NGO dissenters – undermined opportunities for more constructive stakeholder dialogue in the planning process. In our interviews, these lost opportunities were reflected upon. NGO and community members pursued a rejectionist strategy based on the precautionary principle. They challenged the scientific basis for the developers' claims for the safety of the incineration process as citizen scientists (Brown, 1992; Elam & Bertilsson, 2003; Elliott, Harrop, & Williams, 2009; Irwin & Wynne, 1996). Others in the community, however, opted for direct action against the project. Ultimately, Section 4 sets the scene for the reporting on our case study findings which are presented in Section 5.

The material in Section 5 reveals the actors' constructed knowledge (shown via the sociologics). Interviews were part of a systematic data collection process that took place in 2009 and then again in late 2012. Since then we have remained in touch with key individual actors on a more ad hoc basis. The 2009 material focuses largely on events between 1998 and 2002 when the EfWs operating licence was granted. It offers a vivid illustration of the detailed technical sophistication of the opponents to the EfW plant. It also shows how quickly the debate on the merits and weaknesses of the EfW plant moved within and between the polarised networks. Data is then presented from a second round of interviews with the same group in 2012. This material concentrates more on activity at the site since 2002. There was a serious fire in 2003 which temporarily shut the plant and forced co-developer HLC out of the project. The MREC has been shut down twice more – in 2010 and 2012 – for breaches of its operating licence over dioxin emissions. Between 2002 and 2012, the sociologics reveal how constructions of knowledge and network allegiances have been resilient over time. What shifts most significantly from the licensing phase, up to 2002, to the operational phase is the emergence of a Liaison Committee. The activities of this potential 'hybrid forum' (cf. Callon, Lascoumes, & Barthe, 2009), where expertise could be put aside and open dialogue take place, are illustrated through the application of SNA. In the end, power played out very differently in practice in the relationships between Liaison Committee members. For several years, the committee was the focus of ongoing debate over the provision of and access to reliable emissions data, but by 2011 many of the original core community dissenters began dropping away. The core community dissenters argue that the committee is not a true hybrid forum after more than a decade with no resolution on key contested issues. In 2012, dissenters concluded that, for them, the level of engagement on offer only

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/5115211>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/5115211>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)