



Protesting against neoliberal and illiberal governmentalities: A comparative analysis of waste governance in the UK and China

Nick Hacking*, Andrew Flynn

School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WA, United Kingdom



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 December 2016

Received in revised form

11 October 2017

Accepted 17 December 2017

Keywords:

Governmentality

Power

Waste

Deleuze

China

UK

ABSTRACT

The central states of the United Kingdom and China are committed to finding effective ways to govern normative sustainability programmes. A more sustainable waste policy solution than landfill is energy-from-waste (EfW). The governmentality perspective suggests that, to achieve such policy ends, compliance is required from a range of actors who operate at a distance from central states. This paper is the first to draw together theoretical comparisons of Western neoliberal and Chinese governmentality in the context of waste governance. We find that long-standing liberal approaches to power and policy-making witnessed in the UK have parallels with a hybrid mix of socialist governance and Chinese governmentality. Beijing seeks to govern not via neoliberal tactics of 'freedom and liberty', but rather through a distinct planning and administrative rationality. Our comparative case study approach allows us to illustrate the dual facilitative and authoritarian dimensions to 'top-down' compliance given 'bottom-up' counter claims of expertise by citizen scientists and other activists in local communities. This analysis in turn reveals how power plays out between state actors, corporations and local communities in these two different political and planning systems. We suggest that the progressive development of lay expertise in environmental health risks is a dynamic marker of the limits to the top-down imposition of waste policy in both countries. Our approach to comparative analysis draws attention to the need to revisit approaches to neoliberal Western governmentality and to extend empirical investigations using illiberal Chinese governmentality.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Introduction

The UK and Chinese central states are committed to finding effective ways to govern normative shifts towards greater sustainability. However, both countries face serious difficulties with their national waste management strategies. In the face of dwindling options for landfill, each country has committed itself to large construction programmes of energy-from-waste (EfW) plants. Both states support technological claims made by developers and engineers that newer EfW facilities are more sustainable than the previous generation of incinerators. EfW plants reclaim energy from burning unrecoverable municipal solid waste (MSW). Delivery of this new waste infrastructure, however, is well behind schedule in both countries. Corporate claims for EfW sustainability are heavily contested by environmental non-governmental

organisations (NGOs) and members of dissenting affected communities.

In this article, we use a mixture of our own research, a review of secondary sources and a comparative analytical framework to show how the planning systems of both England and Wales and China act as governmental technologies of central control. In this context, we suggest that power plays out very similarly between state actors, developers and local communities in both countries and that there are dynamic limits to the top-down imposition of centralised waste policies. This comparative analytical approach extends descriptive models of governmentality into waste governance in both countries showing that key critical dimensions such as public participation are similarly rarely meaningful in either country. We examine local events in four case studies, two from each country. Events are assessed longitudinally in timelines in the [supplementary material](#). This material reveals that, even when the state achieves its policy ends (i.e. constructing an EfW plant), political challenges to these new facts on the ground remain. Such dissent arises due to perceived negative social, economic and

* Corresponding author.

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

environmental outcomes as evidenced in each timeline.

Our social constructivist analytical framework examines the competing logics of actors involved in contesting the siting and technology of EFW plants. We offer insights into neoliberal governmentality, Chinese illiberal governmentality and ‘rhizomatic’ resistance, a concept from [Deleuze and Guattari \(1987\)](#). The terms rhizome and rhizomatic are part of a powerful notion borrowed from biology - a metaphor for the unlimited horizontal growth of root systems. When applied to analysis of past events, the rhizomatic approach is characterized by “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles.” ([Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, 7](#)). As [Semetsky \(2003, 18\)](#) indicates, a rhizome, or network of dissenting actors: “[multiplies] its own lines and establishing the plurality of unpredictable connections in the open-ended ... smooth, space of its growth.” Smooth or ‘fluid space’ is irregular, open and heterogeneous. This is contrasted to striated space which has rigid schemata and fixed points ordered by hierarchical power ([Allen, 2016; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Murdoch, 2006; Semetsky, 2003](#)).

In our analysis, we suggest parallels between the reactions to the top-down imposition of governmental policy at a distance - via ‘technologies’ of measurement – in these neoliberal and illiberal states. Both countries wish to govern through influencing the choices, aspirations and capacities of individuals (cf. [Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991; Jeffreys & Sigley, 2009; MacKinnon, 2000](#)). [Hindess \(1996, 77\)](#), for example, suggests that the similarities are: “more significant than the obvious doctrinal points on which they differ.” We conclude that our empirical evidence and insights demonstrate the value of extending descriptive models of governmentality and rhizomatic resistance into waste governance analyses in both countries (cf. [Bulkeley, Watson, Hudson, & Weaver, 2005; Jeffreys & Sigley, 2014](#)).

With waste policy governance, we propose a typology ([Fig. 1](#)). There are three types of networks of actors in both countries – developers, regulators and dissenters. The agency of the first two is constrained by striated space. Dissenters occupy fluid space. In both countries, we document social struggles involving dissent by communities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) against powerful, hierarchical actors embedded in institutional structures of governance. We characterise such dissent in terms of rhizomatic resistance. This approach suggests how, where, when and why the limits to the top-down governmental ‘imposition’ of waste policy are contested ([Hacking & Flynn, 2017](#)). Opposing framings of risk of different actors are characterized in terms of: 1) asymmetric power relations in national planning systems ([Murdoch, 2006](#)), 2) the influence of network linkage to traditional and social media which amplify risk perceptions ([Kasperson et al., 1988](#)), 3) specific geographies of resistance ([Keith & Pile, 2013](#)) and, 4) the development of alternative expertise based on citizen science ([Wynne, 1996](#)). Alternative expertise is interesting because expertise and legitimacy are so heavily fought over by opposing actors, particularly regarding environmental health risk perceptions ([Whatmore, 2009](#)).

We argue that the progressive development of lay expertise regarding environmental health risks (and its diffusion via social media) acts as a dynamic indicator of the limits to the top-down governance of waste policy. We suggest governmentality studies should pay more attention to understanding the dynamic nature of rhizomatic dissenter responses (cf. [Deleuze & Guattari, 1987](#)). Our research also offers insights into how and why power plays out similarly between actors given analogous waste planning and administrative rationalities in two very different political systems. Our approach to neoliberal and illiberal governmentalities, summarised in diagrammatic form ([Fig. 1](#)), enables insights into: 1) the asymmetric nature of power relations between state actors,

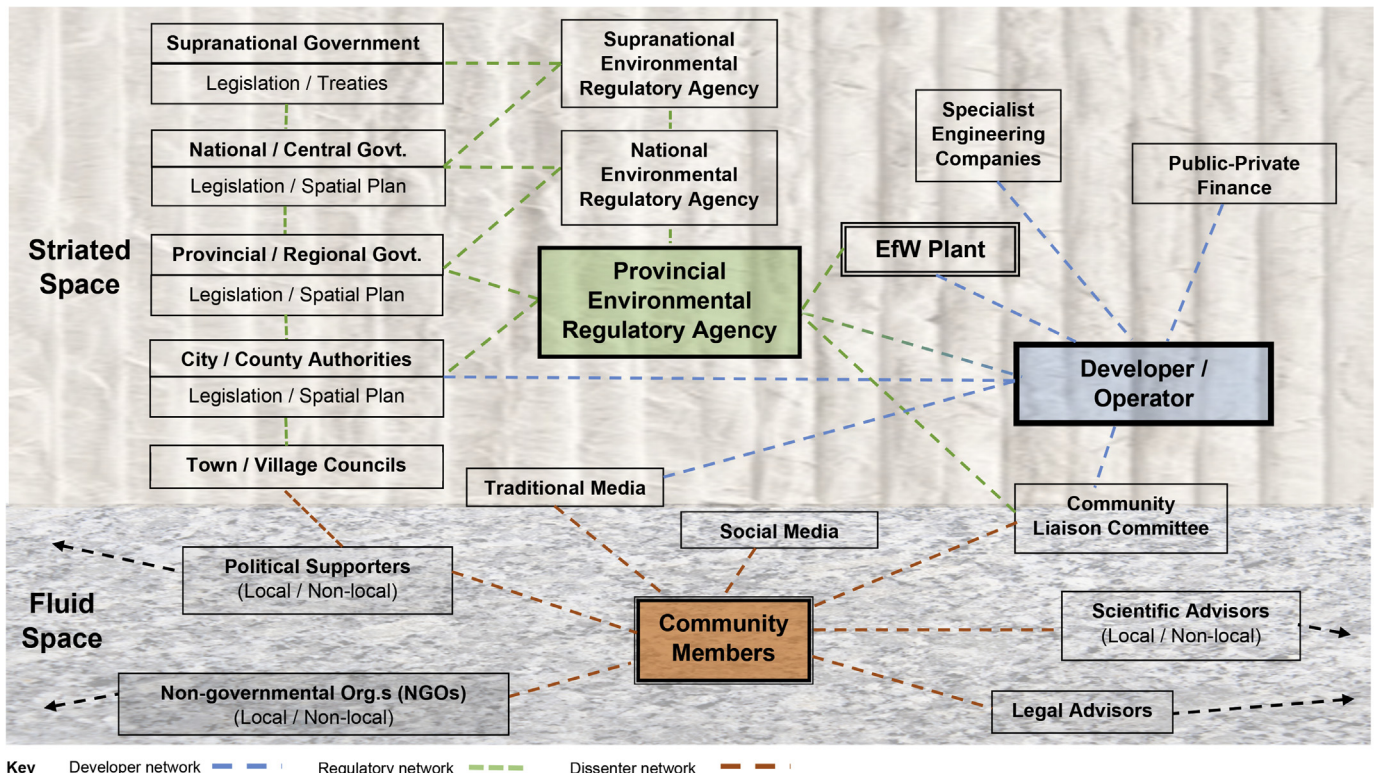


Fig. 1. Three networks operating in striated and fluid space.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7492728>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7492728>

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