
38. Private expertise and the reorganization of spatial planning in England

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38.1 INTRODUCTION

The influence of private-sector consultants in most, if not all, fields of public policy is now widely recognized. Since the concept of the ‘consultocracy’ (Hood and Jackson 1991, p. 24) was coined nearly 30 years ago, a heterogeneous field of research has emerged as consultants have become increasingly central to the operational logics of public administration and governance (Ylönen and Kuusela 2019). Spatial planning is no exception, with scholars increasingly recognizing the role of private-sector actors in shaping professional practice and the places they seek to create (Linovski 2016, 2019; Parker et al. 2018, 2019; Wargent et al. 2019). Indeed spatial planning is perhaps unique in terms of the scope and nature of private-sector influence, given the high level of interaction between public- and private-sector actors (Linovski 2019), and the historical role of consultants in the formation and operation of the profession in the United Kingdom (UK) (Inch et al. forthcoming). Yet little remains known concerning the role of consultants in everyday planning practice and how this contributes to the changing geography of the state.

In recent years, the continual attempts to ‘modernize’, reform and deregulate planning have unfolded alongside an expanding consultancy sector, establishing a powerful dynamic which is increasingly difficult to disentangle (see Parker et al. 2018; Raco 2018). This chapter reflects on the role of the consultocracy in the transformation of the planning profession, to do so the chapter draws on the Strategic-Relational Approach (SRA) (Jessop 1990, 2001) to shed light on how shifting state structures affect political strategies and action, and vice versa (that is, the interrelation of structure and agency). This takes a lead from Valler et al. (2013) in emphasizing the ‘ideational realm’ which frames the motivations of actors and mediates the interplay between context and action, allowing particular ideas and practices to take hold. We therefore reflect on how the reform and reorganization of spatial planning in England that has opened up significant market opportunities for private consultancies within the (local) state, and the ideational consistencies regarding public and private realms that have underpinned the privileged role afforded to private-sector actors.

38.2 NEOLIBERALISM, SPATIAL REORGANIZATION AND PLANNING REFORM IN ENGLAND

Planning is the policy area *par excellence* to consider the optimum degree of state intervention in private property rights and personal freedoms in the interests of local communities and wider society (Shepherd 2018). Unsurprisingly therefore it has been the subject of sustained government inquiry and reform, this has habitually concerned the procedural aspects of the

planning system, seeking to increase efficiency, review issues of public participation and accountability, but also to alter the spatial scale at which planning takes place. This section reflects on the ongoing problematizations of both the planning system in England and its operators through the lens of neoliberalism. In so doing, we will establish the contemporary context in which the private sector has been able to exercise greater influence within an ostensibly public planning system.

Planning policy is established at the national level by the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government via the National Planning Policy Framework. This sets out central government's planning policies for England, how these should be applied and provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development should be produced. The English planning system enjoys a wide range of discretion (unlike countries such as the United States where land use regulations are subject to constitutional challenge); development requires permission, as adjudicated by Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) who must take consideration of national policies, the local development plan (produced by the same authority, again in contrast to other countries such as the United States) and other 'material considerations'. The shifting relationship between the central and local state, in particular the restraints and directions placed on the latter by the former, has been a central feature of planning practice since the Town and Country Planning Act (1947) effectively nationalized the right to develop land.

Whilst the planning system has long been subject to periodic upheavals, it has been argued that recent reforms are more frequent and have taken on neoliberal and even postpolitical characteristics (Allmendinger 2016). Intrinsic to many reforms in the post-war period have been attempts to achieve a universally accepted institutional and spatial 'fixes' for sub-national governance (McGuinness and Mawson 2017). Regional governance has been subject to endless tinkering with repeated failures creating a cycle of churn at the organizational, legislative and programmatic levels, in what Norris and Adam (2017, p. 11) term 'redisorganisation'. Such processes have been mirrored within spatial planning: the revocation of Regional Spatial Strategies (2004–10) – themselves introduced when Structure Plans (1968–2004) were abolished – left England as the only major north-west European country without effective sub-national governance structures (outside London) for spatial planning (McGuinness and Mawson 2017).

The removal of the planning's regional tier was heavily condemned at the time by the responsible government committee for its far-reaching negative social, economic and environmental consequences (CLG Committee 2011). A broad coalition of interests, from the Campaign to Protect Rural England to the British Property Federation, called for greater consideration by government of 'larger-than-local' planning (Valler et al. 2013). Nonetheless, a new localist approach was ushered in to replace the regional one, including the introduction of a range of governance experiments such as Local Enterprise Partnerships, City and Devolution Deals and Neighbourhood Planning. In addition, a legal Duty to Cooperate with neighbouring authorities was placed on LPAs in order to address strategic planning matters beyond their immediate Local Plan.¹ However, instead of creating a 'simpler, quicker, cheaper and less bureaucratic planning system' (Conservative Party 2010, p. 5), the reforms post-2010 have left local planning in England in a state of fragmentation and contrast (TCPA 2013; Parker et al. 2018), the Duty to Cooperate has not evolved to fill the strategic planning void (McGuinness and Mawson 2017), whilst the suite of localist reforms have precipitated a rise

in inter-urban competition to attract capital and increased reliance on market-led development (Raco 2018).

Norris and Adam (2017) argue that constant spatial reorganization may be the result of disagreement about the appropriate spatial level to which to devolve powers, or about the purpose of regional governance more generally. They also highlight central government's longstanding unwillingness to place trust in existing local institutions, as well as intransigence from local politicians, and conflicting messages from local citizens as problematic factors. As Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014, p. 357) have argued, the preoccupation with a 'perpetual whirl of spatial configurations' and their assembled logics masks more fundamental concerns regarding their wider (neoliberal) direction; indeed, processes of reorganization can also be attributed to the neoliberal impulse for experimentation (Peck 2010). Although an increasingly problematic (or at least problematized) concept within planning scholarship, neoliberalism continues to serve as a provisional, if rather unsatisfactory, shorthand for trajectories of political change since the 1970s and the uneven development of a particular culture of governance in which the private realm is variously prioritized over the public one (Inch 2018). The variegated nature of neoliberalism can be explained in part by the contradictory field of political forces specific to spheres of local governance (see Newman 2014), but also propensity of neoliberal governance experiments 'fail forward' whilst reshaping the impure and contradictory yet 'whole' of actually existing neoliberalism:

It is both an indictment of neoliberalism and testament to [neoliberalism's] dogged dynamism, of course, that the laboratory experiments do not 'work'. They have nevertheless tended to 'fail forward', in that their manifest inadequacies have – so far anyway – repeatedly animated further rounds of neoliberal invention. Devolved governance, public-private partnership, management by audit, neopaternalism ... all can be seen as examples of institutional reinvention spawned as much by the limits of earlier forms of neoliberalization as by some advancing 'logic'. (Peck 2010, p. 6)

Reforms to planning – notably the expansion of Permitted Development Rights² and Enterprise Zones,³ the primacy afforded to Viability Assessments,⁴ legal obligations and increased pressure concerning Local Plan completion – can be seen to be driven by a neoliberal ideology that appears antipathetic to planning as a state activity, with system efficiency increasingly regarded as *sine qua non* and prioritized at the expense of alternative rationales or governance goals (Clifford 2016, p. 384). Many of these reforms have opened up market opportunities for consultants, well placed to service the growing exigencies of the planning system.

These reforms have come at a time of significant government retrenchment in the UK, particularly keenly felt at the local level. Between 2010–11 and 2017–18, the total spend on local planning services by LPAs fell 14.6 per cent in real terms from £1.125 billion to £961 million between 2010–11 and 2017–18 (NAO 2019, p. 39). During this time local capacity and expertise have been undermined with a 15 per cent overall decrease in numbers of local planning staff between 2006 and 2016 (NAO 2019, p. 11). Deep cuts in central government grants have been offset by increased commercial activity within LPAs, using planning fees, pre-application discussions⁵ and Planning Performance Agreements⁶ to raise income. Austerity, coupled with a virulent strain of anti-statist rhetoric promulgated by central government over the same period (Featherstone et al. 2012), has placed huge pressure on LPAs to find efficiencies. This has resulted in LPAs adopting increasingly commercialized models and taking on new financial risks, meaning they are increasingly tying the solvency of LAs to market fluctuations (Raco 2018).

Reductions in capacity have not coincided with a reduction in planning's statutory responsibilities however. Prior to the Conservative administrations (2010–present), New Labour's (1997–2010) rhetoric of 'modernization' brought with it a broader conceptualization of planning's role under the guise of spatial planning. Definitions of what spatial planning actually constitutes were, and continue to be, diverse and not always illuminating, beyond a focus upon the qualities and management of space and place (see, RTPI 2001). The renewed interest in planning, however, brought with it a strong emphasis on evidence-based policy and a significant expansion in statutory regulations (e.g. Lord and Hincks 2010). Indeed by the 1990s, planners had already become increasingly embroiled in technical exercises such as environmental and retail impact assessments, and these new demands had the effect of funnelling planners into new specialist and technical roles, with the remainder left to interpret these inputs into new political processes through a process of 'residualization' (Higgins and Allmendinger 1999, p. 44). This duality of functions was reinforced as planners also became involved in other non-traditional areas of work such as town centre management and nature conservation. Consultants began to be frequently employed to complete such tasks, or else interpret them for the relevant authority (Davoudi and Healey 1990; Higgins and Allmendinger 1999).

Throughout this period, planning's *raison d'être* has continued to be facilitating growth – a focus that dates back to the Thatcher administrations (1979–90). More recently however the framing of planning has become 'more rational, technocratic, and planned through the formal scales of planning' (Haughton et al. 2013, p. 225). The primacy of rationality and evidence within planning practice was consolidated by the Planning and Compensation Act (1991) that explicitly established a plan-led system. Further emphasis was placed on evidence in 2004, when the notion of 'soundness' entered legislation: whether a plan can be considered to be 'sound' relates to its conformity with higher-tier plans and policies but also whether or not it is based on evidence (Davoudi 2006). More recently, renewed political emphasis on Local Plans has further pressurized LPAs to produce more robust plans and in a shorter timeframe.

A Local Plan's evidence base comprises a significant number of ostensibly discrete studies and assessments that can be completed in isolation (i.e. without reference to the rest of the plan) by any qualified expert – before these inputs are then used to assemble the plan itself. At a time of a constricted public sector, the consultancy market has been well placed to service such tasks within an increasingly task-based, compartmentalized planning system (Parker et al. 2018). This expansion of planning regulations and evidentiary requirements can be seen as symptomatic of the rise of regulatory capitalism, where the (smaller and streamlined) state commissions the activities of non-state providers to deliver services traditionally provided by the former (Braithwaite 2008). In line with the New Public Management (NPM) thesis, one facet of a more 'businesslike' approach to public administration has been the 'reconceptualization of analytical inputs as commodities, rather than integral parts of government's pursuit of the public interest' (Perl and White 2002, p. 66).

This increased regulatory burden (i.e. *rollout* neoliberalism) has not been entirely one directional. The introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework in 2012 and the passing of the Deregulation Act (2015) have sought to deregulate planning (i.e. *rollback* neoliberalism) regulation, for example moves to allow 'alternative providers' to process development proposals. Some attempts to roll back regulation have acted to create new burdens which shift the burdens to different parties, as is the case with Permitted Development Rights (Clifford et al. 2018). Nonetheless demands on planners remain formidable: notably the negotiation of

planning agreements, the production of binding Local Plans and managing ambiguities around the Duty to Cooperate.

This cycle of deregulation and reregulation reveals the incomplete nature of neoliberalism, as the planning system is pulled in different directions by both ideological conceptions of its role by myriad actors. The effect of such back-and-forth of regulatory change (what might be termed *rock-and-roll* neoliberalism) creates another form of burden, with local planners having to get up to speed with regulatory changes with increasing frequency. This provides further market opportunities for consultancies to advise both public and private clients on the effect of new regulations, and to shape new initiatives through lobbying and practice (Parker et al. 2019). One example of this has been Neighbourhood Planning, a voluntary initiative that allows communities to author statutory development plans for their (ostensibly self-defined) neighbourhood. By officially recognizing the smaller-than-local scale in England for the first time, Neighbourhood Planning is a further example of spatial reorganization that has placed greater demands on LPAs to support participating communities and master a new set of regulations (Parker et al. 2015). The majority of participating communities have enlisted the help of consultants, typically paid for through state grants awarded to communities, where they have become integral to all parts of the process (Wargent and Parker 2018), mediating between communities and professionals, shaping the structures that govern their own and others' conduct (Wargent et al. 2019).

This section has briefly described how substantive changes to UK planning have opened up market opportunities for private-sector planners. It has sought to explicate how these substantive changes (resource constraints in the public sector, the increase in technical demands and new forms of knowledge and the frequency of top-down reform) have opened up market opportunities for consultants. The following section explores the rationales deployed within the planning context that have facilitated the increasing influence of the private sector.

38.3 IDEATIONAL CONTINUITIES AND THE INCREASING INFLUENCE OF PRIVATE EXPERTISE

The history of planning in the UK is one of shifting roles, responsibilities and claims to knowledge between public and private sectors. The majority of planning scholarship however continues to focus on the work of public-sector employees – yet before 1947, planning was an almost exclusively private pursuit of a group of architect-planners. In the post-war period consultants continued to play various roles and lay claim to particular forms of knowledge, with both private and public sectors as clients. Although difficult to trace precisely, throughout this period the proportion of planners working in the private sector has proved relatively consistent – around a fifth of the Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) membership – with notably lower points in the late 1950s and early 1980s. Since the turn of the twenty-first century, however, the number of consultants has increased significantly, approaching half of the RTPI's membership. The result is a substantial and adaptive planning consultancy market in the UK, with larger firms consolidating their position by retaining sizeable contracts and client bases and absorbing other consultancies, alongside a parallel process of diversification through the mushrooming of smaller firms both responding to changing needs and markets in planning and development services (Raco 2018, pp. 128–32).

Within the UK at least, the increasing role of private actors within the (local) state has been largely overlooked. Recent research has shown for example that Local Plans can be produced without private-sector input (Wargent et al. 2019), and yet detailed investigations into the creation and purpose of such plans neglects to recognize their influence (LPEG 2016). The shifting political, economic and institutional context within which planning is performed therefore is one that appears ambivalent to the increased influence of the private sector. Recognizing the contrast between the constrained agency of local public planners and the growing ambit of consultants reveals the trajectory of reforms within a strategically selective context that privileges particular interests and activities. Private actors not only service the demands of the planning system, but in the case of larger consultancies have significant access to the central machinery of government and central planning functions. This is achieved through traditional lobbying activities (see Linovski 2019), conducting research for central government departments, responding to policy consultations and advising departments directly. For instance, in 2018, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government employed two consultancies, AECOM and Intelligent Plans and Examinations, to assess the abilities of a number of English LPAs to write their own Local Plan, with a view to the same specialists undertaking work on plan production should the LPAs not comply in the time required. Such examples reveal the significant capacity of private-sector agents to adjust regulatory structures, and in this case secure their market position, due to the ‘strategically selective’ nature of structures, which operate to reinforce particular actions whilst discouraging alternatives (Jessop 1990, pp. 9–10).

The ‘take-off’ point for private-sector planning around the millennium also saw a subtle change in the perennial debates about the distinctive knowledge base of planning. Despite the view that there is not, and cannot, be a distinctive intellectual base or competence for planning (Reade 1987), planners have frequently laid claim to a distinctive form of knowledge derived from the connections between the physical environment or design base and social science elements (Brown et al. 2003). However, in 2001, planning’s professional institute began to argue that the profession should see ‘planning as an activity which professional planners facilitate, but do not own or monopolise’ (RTPI 2001, p. 2), thereby recognizing the profession’s permeable boundaries, the different kinds of expertise required in planning and to some extent that claims to professional authority have become increasingly open to challenge (Campbell and Marshall 2005, pp. 208–9).

This rhetorical shift coincided with both the expansion of technical inputs required to service the planning system, and a near continuous reorganization of planning and spatial governance recounted above (Parker et al. 2018). Despite these shifting sands, the definitional boundaries of who can be formally labelled as a chartered town planner remain little changed. A further consistency, dating back to the Schuster Committee on the Qualifications of Planners (1950), has been the need to attract the ‘best and brightest’ into planning (Inch et al. forthcoming) – reflecting persistent fears about the calibre of public planning professionals and their ability to operate the planning system effectively and creatively. Attacks on the ability of planners recur throughout the post-war period, perhaps most notably during the early Thatcher administrations of the 1980s when ‘planner bashing’ became a national past time (Hague 1984, p. 96). Indeed recent attacks on planners as a ‘burden on business’ (alongside attempts to create ‘market-orientated’ planners) and doubts about the ability of planners themselves are a direct imitation of earlier Conservative governments (e.g. *Lifting the Burden* White Paper in 1985).

Questions over the ability of public planners is one example of a remarkably durable set of beliefs about the characteristics of both public and private realms. These relate to the skills, expertise and dispositions of the actors within each sector, as well as the opportunities that exist within each. Such ‘myths’ are not limited to planning and are widely shared in other industries and professions and indeed in society more generally (e.g. Mazzucato 2014). One persistent example is the belief that private-sector careers offer more scope to graduating students to utilize their creative skills in planning and urban design, whereas the public sector is marked by bureaucracy (Ferm 2018, p. 47). The creativity/bureaucratic distinction can again be traced back to the inception of the planning system: a report authored by senior civil servants in the then Ministry of Town and Country Planning in 1950 claimed that public planners are typically:

immersed in statutory responsibilities and day to day ‘cases’ can seldom have the time even if they have the experience to tackle these constructive jobs. If it were recognised that this sort of work is often best done by consultants the officers of the public authorities can become more purely administrative (which may be dull for them but is inevitable).⁷

The corresponding view that consultants embody innovation, autonomy and visionary expertise (Cherry 1974) continues today, as Linovski (2016, p. 461) has found in the North American context: ‘The belief that consultants were more creative, had a better understanding of market forces, and were less bound by the existing political and bureaucratic framework than city employees, was used to reinforce both their expertise and autonomy. In contrast, public sector professionals were posited as having administrative or regulatory expertise.’ Such myths have survived the increasing fluidity between public and private sectors within contemporary planning practice. Recent years have seen increasing mobility across roles (such as regeneration, policy making and development control) and between public and private sectors (Brown et al. 2003). Work by Linovski (2019) suggests that the fluidity of professionals between projects, sectors and firms has had the effect of reinforcing the perceived ‘value and neutrality’ of consultant expertise, with the effect of aligning public- and private-sector planning processes and resulting in a high degree of influence for development interests. Indeed, much of the logic of consultancy continues to be based on a modernist view of disembodied knowledge that can be dispassionately and legitimately applied regardless of context. In this spirit, Zanotto (2019) has recently described various forms of ‘detachment’ that planners can deploy in practice – principally, denying the link between the ‘technical service’ they provide and the social structures that both shape and are sustained by their actions.

This understanding of technical inputs as divorced from socio-political outcomes they seek to effect is well established, as indeed is a normative ideal of public/private partnership working, as this comment by Sir Patrick Abercrombie to the Schuster Committee in 1949 attests:

a Planning Consultant is really no different in essence from a consultant in any other technical capacity e.g. Engineering, Drainage and Water Supply or Architectural. The object of calling-in an outside consultant is to have someone to collaborate with the Local Officer: the first brings experience gained from a wide and varied practice, the second brings profound local information. Each technician, the outsider and the local man [sic] should be of equal calibre for the best results to be obtained.⁸

Such caricatures appear to have been reinforced by the residualization effects of increasingly technocratic planning described by Higgins and Allmendinger (1999). Indeed, the fragmentation of planning described by Parker et al. (2018) mirrors that of private-sector work into deliverable ‘packages’ that can be commodified. Zanotto (2019, p. 49) argues that such fragmentation is a necessary process that allows planners to ‘narrow the lens through which they reflect upon their work and establish a sense of distance between their practices, planning values, and the politics of their work’ and allow for ‘chameleon-like’ (see Hillier 2002) behaviours in seeking to service the interests of different parties.

Zanotto’s (2019, p. 47) description of planning consultants working for private developers in Brazil reveals how the former can come to sympathize with the concerns of the latter, adopt their language and echo their criticisms of the public sector:

Planners’ acknowledgement of market forces is part of a broader understanding of their practice – an understanding shaped by interactions with developers, their own experience dealing with regulatory agencies, and their perception of urban problems ... Planners express a critical view of regulatory agencies and echo their clients’ [i.e. developers] complaints that agencies have excessive requirements and do not communicate with one another, the approval process is too long, public employees are too slow and not helpful, and information is often unclear. They share with their clients the belief that the public sector is unable to perform its duties and the private market must step in. Thus, planners express favorable views of market influence in planning and regulating the city.

Both Linovski’s (2019) and Zanotto’s (2019) findings indicate how the *habitus* of planning and the elision of public and private working practices might presage or reinforce the marketization of planning (see, Raco 2018). In other words, this raises interesting questions about ‘relations of co-production’ (Parker et al. 2019, p. 167) that exist between public and private planners – as well as myriad other stakeholders involved in the front line of planning practice, not least local politicians. Invoking Hillier’s (2002, pp. 193–217) analogy, Zanotto (2019, p. 48) argues that private-sector professionals act as chameleons in emphasizing the technical aspects of their work, but also deploy particular strategies as ‘market missionaries’, with use of detachment again central to this process:

Rather than concerning itself with planning’s grand narratives, detachment is about utilizing one’s professional expertise to perform the task at hand, to think about ‘that one parcel and that one developer’; to please ‘whoever hired us’ ... It concerns specific, small, and temporally and spatially localized actions. Although the outcomes of these actions may have broad implications, detached planners believe that it is not their job to think about those.

Employing detachment allows planners to engage in a form of mimesis, supposedly channeling the motivations, dispositions and perspectives of their client. This may mean embracing the views of developers as above, but it also allows consultants acting for public clients to embrace values typically associated with the ‘public interest’ such as environmental concerns, inclusion and sustainability.

Such a reading presents a contradiction between consultants’ supposed impartiality and an ability to adopt their client’s motivations. In this light, Linovski (2019, pp. 1963–94) shows how flexible beliefs concerning consultants allow a mediation between public and private interests:

the influence lies in shaping the focus – or realm of possibilities – for municipal policies, rather than the day-to-day negotiations around projects and policies ... These processes could not occur without the presence of a shadow agency of consultant planners – seen as ‘friendly’ firms and often headed by former city staff – moving fluidly between public- and private-sector contracts. This close network between public- and private-sector professionals obscured the differing interests that they represented and limited the realm of possibilities considered. The end result is a seeming convergence of development and public interests, mobilized through the work of professional consultants.

As such, despite consultants often being perceived as politically independent, their involvement may help facilitate the integration of neoliberal ideologies and reconceptualize public values (Diefenbach 2009). Such a view recognizes policy actors as ‘sociologically complex’, with individuals’ ‘identities and professional trajectories ... bound up with the policy positions and fixes that they espouse’ (Peck and Theodore 2010, p. 170). This opposes sections of the wider consultocracy literature that seeks to reify ‘turbulent’ policy fields whilst bracketing out consultants, treating them as a response to the turbulence, rather than as integral to its reproduction as turbulent (Prince 2012, p. 196).

A further characteristic typically applied to consultants is that of efficiency (see Wargent et al. 2019). A central trope of planning discourse, efficiency – usually interpreted as ‘speeding up’ the planning system, either ‘getting out of the way’ of, or actively facilitating, the market, whilst achieving reducing costs – has preoccupied central government in the UK since at least the 1960s (Parker et al. 2018). Informed by Public Choice Theory, the pursuit of greater efficiency has gone hand in hand with the shift to consultocracy and managerialism, underpinned by ‘a belief that consultants provide knowledge that the public sector cannot produce’ – as one consultant relayed to Ylönen and Kuusela (2019, p. 252): an ‘efficiency perspective is pretty much a built-in characteristic of consultants, and for a consultant, it is difficult to see it as politics’. Although originally a preoccupation of the public planning system, efficiency is now firmly the preserve of the private sector, particularly larger firms that can highlight wide ranging experience and economies of scale.

Such perceptions make the commissioning of private expertise uncontroversial – and may in fact be driven more by faith than by rationality. The value of the SRA approach here is the emphasis placed on the ideational realm, the discursive construction of perceptions that legitimize the strategizing of specific actors. The persistence of certain understandings around public and private realms helps explain the unproblematic rise of private actors in an ostensibly public planning system, just as much as substantive policy shifts. Indeed, the two are symbiotic, as can be seen by the UK localist agenda pursued since 2010, that is rooted in a powerful spatial imaginary through which an anti-state agenda has been mobilized (Featherstone et al. 2012). This has furthered the belief that the local state should adopt more businesslike approaches (i.e. NPM) and align itself with the private sector’s working practices, creating a context in which consultant use is all but inevitable.

38.4 CONCLUSIONS

Changes to planning in England over the past two decades have opened up significant market opportunities for private-sector actors who are becoming increasingly central to planning systems and the places they seek to govern. This chapter has sought to show how the confluence of substantial policy shifts (increased technical demands and new forms of knowledge

required from planners to service the planning system, the frequency of reform and spatial reorganization of planning and resource constraints in the public sector) and ideational consistencies (persistent beliefs about public and private attributes, dominance of NPM and anti-statist rhetoric) have created and maintained the conditions for the rise of the so-called 'consultocracy'. Private actors increasingly contribute to the production and transformation of state territory as a spatial entity through privileged, or at the very least, increased access to spaces of governance both within and without the planning system. The changing geography of planning in the UK since 2010, and the continued whirl of spatial 'reorganization', continues to create market opportunities for external experts to service an emaciated local state. We have briefly drawn on the SRA approach here, and suggest it may prove useful way through which to consider the rise of the consultocracy, given its emphasis on the ideational and discursive levels which underscore processes of perception and strategizing on the part of specific actors (Valler et al. 2013), as well as the substantive effect of reforms.

Although the influence of private professionals on the operation of the public planning system is increasingly well recognized, much less is known about the agency of consultants and the reworking of local planning cultures and the wider professional ethos. The profession itself appears to have been slow on the uptake regarding the scale and significance of the privatization of planning, despite the potential for fundamental alterations to its structures and purpose. The relationship between planning departments and external capacity and expertise may not be a new phenomenon, but such entanglements are becoming both more intricate and more opaque, creating an interdependence that may leave LPAs – and public authorities more generally – vulnerable. The increasingly co-dependent relationship between public and private planners makes it progressively more difficult to pull apart the ideological rationalities that drive governmental reform and frame everyday practice; and just as problematically, such processes of privatization also raise attendant questions concerning democratic legitimacy, accountability and transparency.

NOTES

1. Local Plans are statutory planning documents that set out a framework of strategic priorities for future development within an LPA's jurisdiction. They cover a range of issues including: housing; commercial development (such as retail and leisure); infrastructure (including transport, minerals, waste, energy and water supply) and education, health, police and community facilities; and the protection of the natural and historic environment. Since 2010 greater salience has been placed on Local Plans, and significant political pressure has been exerted by central government to keep plans up to date. The duty to develop Local Plans lies with the LPA although the assembly of a plan involves significant input from the private sector in various and increasing capacities yet little remains known about the nature and extent of their input.
2. Permitted Development Rights are a form of deregulation that allow certain changes to buildings without the need to apply for planning permission.
3. Enterprise Zones are geographical areas in which commercial and industrial businesses receive incentives to set up or expand (for example business rate discounts and capital allowances to purchase machinery and equipment).
4. Viability Assessments involve the process of assessing whether a site is financially feasible, through considering whether the value generated by a development is more than the cost of developing it. This can include looking at variables such as gross development value, costs, land value, landowner premium and developer return.

5. Pre-application discussions are a collaborative process between a prospective applicant for planning permission and LPAs (as well as local politicians, local people and other consultees). As a discretionary service, LPAs can charge prospective applicants for the service.
6. Planning Performance Agreements are a project management tool entered into by the prospective applicant for planning permission and the LPA in order to agree timescales, actions and resources for handling particular applications. As with pre-application discussions, LPAs can charge prospective applicants for the service.
7. The National Archives HLG/87/2: Schuster Committee Agenda and Minutes and Committee Papers, Sketch for Report, QP15, p16.
8. Ibid.

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