

Networks, power and environmental planning

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Outline of presentation

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Local politics, local planning: normative

- “Collaborative collective action is possible [and it] will be more likely to resist forces leading to economic exploitation of people in places, to limit environmental degradation, and to maximise the possibilities of human flourishing in sustainable environmental relations than cultures which are dominated by individualist competitive strategies.”
- Healey (1998, 1535)
- Normative vision
- **How realistic is this in the face of local power relations?**

Local politics, local planning: pragmatic

- “Planners are special guardians [of the public interest] ... [and this is] is still ensconced in British local authority planning, probably because of the well-established responsibility ethic which is attached to local government in this country. Those who adhere to this stance fail to realize the *realpolitik* of the pluralistic society in which we live - that is, a society comprising a multitude of social groups having different, competing, and not infrequently conflicting sets of values.”
- Damer and Hague, (1971, 225)
- How then *should* planners guard the public interest?
- And who defines what is the public interest at the local level?

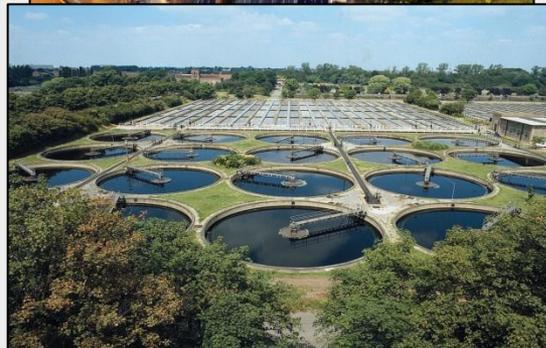
Approaches to planning and power

- Critique of rational planning
- Crisis in planning theory and practice
- Argumentative turn produced pluralism of approaches including:
 - Advocacy
 - Marxist
 - Collaborative / Communicative
 - Foucauldian
 - and others...

Approaches to planning and power

- How is power is played out leading up to a decision?
- How is power played out after a decision has been made?
 - The making of the decision is not the end point but rather a key moment in a continuing process of engagement between actors over the nature of communities
- Power is embedded in network relations
 - How do networks make use of legislative and regulatory rules to assert their authority?
 - Do actors behave consistently towards rules or over time is a dynamic interpretation possible?

Land use: exploitation vs. equity



Community: geographies of resistance



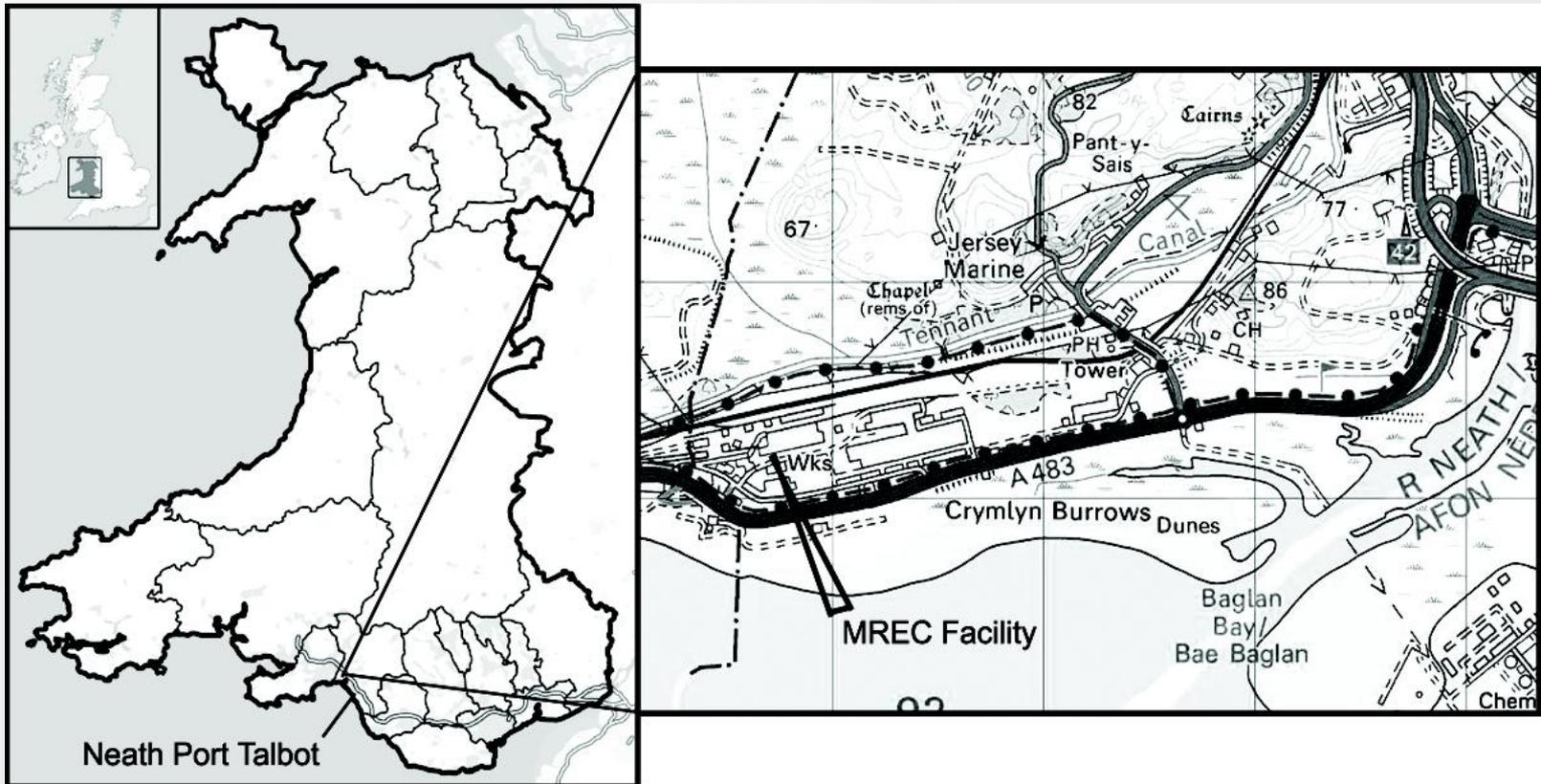
An energy-from-waste (EfW) proposal

- September 1998 Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council (NPTCBC) and a Portuguese-owned waste operator HLC (Neath Port Talbot) Ltd, proposed a £32m waste recovery and incineration development at Crymlyn Burrows
 - known as the Materials Recovery and Energy Centre (MREC).
- Operate for 25 years
- NPTCBC hoped that project would provide an alternative to sending too much waste to landfill sites
- The Council had the worst waste recycling record in Wales

Materials Recovery & Energy Centre (MREC)



Crymlyn Burrows: location



Local pollution: making the dirt stick (1)

- 150-megawatt (MW) power station built in 1935
 - At the time, Tir John power station biggest in Britain
- Operated from 1936 to 1976
- Burned powdered anthracite duff, a cheap waste product from the washing of mined coal at the pit-head
 - Put sulphur dioxide into the local atmosphere and was a significant source of pollution on the East Side of Swansea

Local pollution: making the dirt stick (2)

- Anchor Chemical Ltd. opened in 1948
 - Produced 'Dixie and Kosmos grade' carbon blacks which act as a pigment and reinforcing phase in car tyres and other rubber products.
 - Clear at the time that short-term exposure to high concentrations of carbon black dust could mechanically irritate the upper respiratory tract and produce discomfort.
- Next to the works a tar distillery up until the 1970s
 - Mixture of materials, produced by partial combustion of heavy oil-based products, possibly carcinogenic in humans

United carbon black factory

- "... clouds of black smut and dirt which constantly rain down on the houses nearby. This makes it impossible for washing to be hung outside. Within an hour it is filthy, so all washing has to be dried indoors. But the dirt also comes indoors, covering food, furniture, children and babies. A local manager of the factory once remarked that the people of the area were living in slums anyway, why were they complaining about dirt?" (cf. Bone, 1971)

Case study selection: criteria (1)

- shows some communities have a long history
- makes locally-unwanted land-uses 'illegitimate'

“[A]part from the environmental things it is the social injustice. That’s what really, really annoys me as well. More so. It’s not fair. It’s really not fair ... Why are we always being dumped on?”

- Community Activist

Case study selection: criteria (2)

- reveals local political power structures (Rootes 2006)
- sympathetic review of waste management studies:
 - strong health concerns from communities/NGOs
 - communities prepared to organise
 - access to planning records under EIA regulations

Case study selection: criteria (3)

- Reveals issues of environmental risk perception
- Role of contested technologies in the planning arena
- Focus of actor-networks to show dynamics of support and opposition for a development proposal

Methodology

Data:

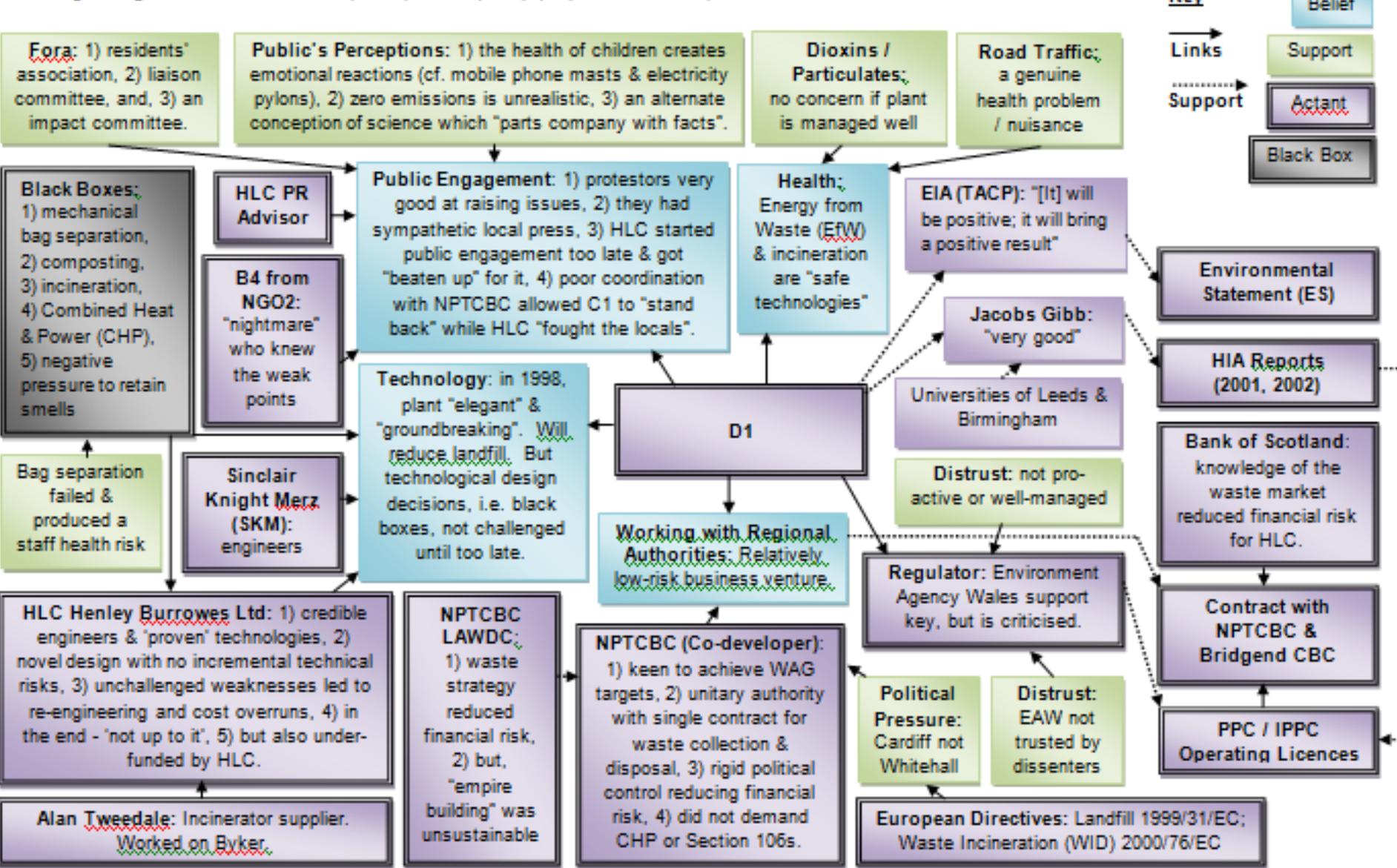
- Archive press articles and NGO documents
- Qualitative interview data

Analytical framework:

- Governmentality / actor network theory
- Environmental risk perception
- Reflexivity

Timeline / Sociologic Diagrams

Sociologic Diagram for the Co-Developer/Operator (HLC) (D1) in the Developers' Actor-Network



• Does this display of data help or hinder our understanding of the dynamics?

Network formation / Governance

- Regulatory actor-network



Asiantaeth yr
Amgylchedd Cymru
Environment
Agency Wales

- Developer actor-network



- Dissenter actor-network



Framings and power: the regulator network



- Subject to inflexible governmentality techniques
- Rigid adherence to procedure
- Attempts governance of other networks via governmentality (fails with dissenters)
- High reflexivity with developer actor-network
- Low perception of environmental risk
- Low reflexivity with dissenter actor-network
- Dismissal of precautionary concerns

Framings and power: the regulator network

“[T]he Agency’s duty is such that if the determination is done and we find that it meets the standards that we have got written down ... the Agency has no alternative ... [but] to issue the permit ... We [the Agency] are constrained by what the law tells us to do.”

“They don’t seem to understand that if they burn something in their garden they are probably producing more [dioxins] ... going to the local social club once a year would give people a bigger dose of PM_{10} and plenty of other pollutants than they’ll ever get from a year’s worth of living within one mile of this incinerator.”

Framings and power: the developer network



- Subject to semi-flexible governmentality techniques
- Adherence to procedure
- Attempts engagement with dissenter network via governmentality (fails)
- High reflexivity with regulatory actor-network
- Low perception of environmental risk
- Low reflexivity with dissenter actor-network
- Dismissal of precautionary concerns

Framings and power: the developer network

- “[T]heir [the public] perception of risk is different to [my] perception of risk ... They would try to trap you. There would be a public debate going on, ‘Can you guarantee me there will be zero emissions from this plant?’ I said, ‘No I can’t guarantee you there will be zero emissions, there will be some emissions, but the risk of impact is the same as a bolt of lightning hitting me...’ But because you cannot say indefinitely it will be zero then there’s a risk, therefore [they say] ‘No thank you.’”

Framings and power: the protestor network



- Subject to governmentality techniques
- Pre-existing lack of trust in political institutions
- Low reflexivity with other actor-networks
- High perception of environmental risk (health)
- Low reflexivity with dissenter actor-network
- Advocation of precautionary framing
- Some direct action

Framings and power: the protestor network

- “You don’t wake up every morning thinking ‘There’s an incinerator coming and I’m going to be breathing in $2.5s$, $PM_{2.5}s$, and I might get asthma.’ You don’t live like that ... [but] once you’ve got kids you worry about every single thing ... All I know is my neighbours some of whom have never smoked in their lives, who do not drink, [who] like fish, who cook proper food, are getting very, very ill.”
- **Does a comparative network approach work?**

The decision

- May 9th, 2002 – Environment Agency Wales (EAW) grants Integrated Pollution Prevention & Control (IPPC) licence to the planned MREC development
- EAW then shifts role from permittor to auditor
- Community refuses to accept this EAW role as well citing conflict of interest and trust issues – protest continues
- Community seeks independent emissions auditing but fail to convince EAW of the validity of approach

Temporary plant closure: triumph of the community?

- Dec 24th, 2010 – MREC waste plant temporarily closed down because of concern over emissions
- The MREC plant had failed five out of ten tests for dioxide emissions
- "We [the EAW] set the permit limits to protect people and the environment and this is why we, as regulators of the site, have escalated our action [issued an enforcement notice]." (BBC, 2010)

Temporary plant closure: triumph of the community?

- Jun 9th, 2011 – the MREC reopens after cleaning and refitting with emissions control equipment
- Protestors had provisionally been able to enrol a key actant – the EAW – in their actor-network and thus line up a regulatory network alongside their own
- The future operation of the plant appears even more uncertain than it would otherwise have been
- But, for the community, the plant is *still* open

Conclusions

- The decision does not lead to the end of dissent
- Networks do not die after a decision
- Local sense of social injustice maintains dissenter actor-network
- Emerging data challenged the dominant view that incineration is a low risk activity
- Analytical framework unpicked this trial of strength over a technological black box (incineration)
- dynamic nature of network relations demonstrates the value of a longitudinal case study approach
- **How relevant are these findings to other planning systems and communities in Europe?**