Making sense of exceptional planning decisions: exploring the agonistic dynamics of sustainability in infrastructure planning

Mirka Virtanen

Published online: 25 Jun 2025.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Making sense of exceptional planning decisions: exploring the agonistic dynamics of sustainability in infrastructure planning

Mirka Virtanen 🔟

School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Cardiff, Wales

ABSTRACT

The ambiguity of sustainable development is commonly perceived as negative, leading to unsustainable planning decisions and projects. In the UK, the devolution of planning powers to the subnational level, as in the case of Wales, however, is resulting in re-interpretations of sustainability through the emerging planning framework. This article utilizes agonism to explore the contested nature of sustainability to assess the scope for re-interpretations provided by the devolved planning system in Wales. To explore the formation of localized sustainability discourses and their influence on the planning process, this paper takes inspiration from the field of media studies, adopting the method of media analysis to investigate the research questions. Exploring how the media represents the contested sustainability of the case of the proposed M4 Corridor around Newport (M4CaN) motorway plan in Wales, the paper argues that local media provides an agonistic platform for constructing alternative arguments that challenge those initially put forward by decisionmakers. While the media's own news logic influences how narratives come together and which ones gain traction, it nevertheless provides space for local actors to construct alternative knowledges of sustainability that, over time, come to facilitate support for political decisions to move away from unsustainable infrastructure planning.

Introduction

Although European planning systems operate within diverse regulatory frameworks and governance cultures, they share a broader context defined by neoliberal growth politics and a reliance on market mechanisms (Nadin and Fernández-Maldonado 2023). Sustainable development is widely adopted as a shared objective, but planning often falls short in addressing the challenges generated by pro-growth development trajectories (Næss 2023). Sustainable development, in theory, balances social concerns, environmental protections, and economic growth to ensure long-term prosperity. In practice, the concept is widely critiqued as contested and ambiguous (Connelly 2007).

CONTACT Mirka Virtanen ✉ virtanenmj1@cardiff.ac.uk 🖥 School of Geography and Planning, Cardiff University, Glamorgan Building, King Edward VII Avenue, Cardiff, CF10 3WA, Wales, United Kingdom

Infrastructure planning, in particular, is shaped by conflicting pressures such as urgent decarbonization, economic growth imperatives, and localized land-use struggles. These constrain what is ultimately delivered (Goulden, Ryley, and Dingwall 2014). The absence of clearly defined sustainability objectives in planning policies commonly results in the prioritization of economic growth, reinforcing unsustainable development. This is the case in infrastructure planning, where investment into projects is justified by their growth-generating prospects. Yet, exceptions to this norm occasionally arise. This article investigates such exceptions, defined as planning decisions that resist the dominant interpretation of sustainability as economic development. It considers how and why some infrastructure planning decisions deviate from this trajectory despite policy ambiguity, thereby contributing to wider debates on planning's role in sustainable development.

The 2019 cancellation of the proposed M4 motorway expansion in South Wales (M4CaN) is explored here as an exceptional case of infrastructure planning that challenged the hegemony of the economic development discourse in Welsh infrastructure planning. In the UK, planning has been shaped by the participatory approach adopted in strategic spatial planning (Bafarasat and Oliveira 2020). Infrastructure planning, however, is characterized by discretion and flexibility, and participation is often regarded late-stage and tokenistic (Cowell et al. 2020; Smyth 2021). The M4CaN project, initiated by the devolved Welsh Government, proposed a new motorway route, the 'black route', to relieve congestion. The route would have crossed ecologically sensitive Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) of the Gwent Levels. The proposal ignited a prolonged and contentious public debate, played out in campaigns, the planning inquiry and the local media. Although initially justified on economic grounds, the eventual decision to cancel the scheme remarkably reflected a prioritization of environmental concerns over economic growth.

While planning scholarship has examined how discourse shapes practice (Rydin 2021; Zanotto 2020), and media studies have explored the construction of discourse through news coverage (Carvalho 2008), the role of media as both a platform for and an influencer of planning discourses remains underexplored. This research addresses that gap by examining two Welsh news sources that reported extensively on M4CaN between 2013 and 2019. It employs an agonistic framework, viewing reality as dynamically constituted by pluralistic and conflictual us/them relations (Hillier 2016; Mouffe 2013). The article analyses how media discourses can challenge the hegemonic growth-oriented narrative. By enabling the expression of diverse voices, local media can facilitate discursive struggles that reshape how sustainability is understood in infrastructure planning.

The paper thus aims to improve understanding of how local news media shape contested interpretations of sustainability in infrastructure planning. It argues that media matters in local and regional planning by influencing which discourses support or challenge planned projects. The core research question is: to what extent does news media reinforce dominant pro-growth planning approaches, and how does it create space for alternative interpretations of sustainability to emerge? Using the M4CaN case, the paper explores how media dynamics enable and constrain stakeholder involvement in the planning discourse. Through an agonistic lens, the research uncovers how the media both reproduces and disrupts dominant sustainability narratives, revealing the discursive complexity of large-scale infrastructure planning that takes place against the backdrop of policy ambiguity.

The paper is structured as follows: it first explores debates on agonism to develop an understanding of how the media provides a space for planning struggles beyond formal processes. It then reviews literature on the relationship between media and planning, identifying the gap in planning literature in understanding the influence of local media upon planning discourses and their contested claims to sustainability. The argument that media's agonistic dynamics shape planning outcomes through enabling a set of more diverse knowledges to influence the planning discourse than is the case with procedural planning is put forward. The empirical section analyses media content to examine whose voices are represented, to what extent, and what sustainability discourses are promoted in relation to M4CaN. The findings suggest that diverse media engagement may strengthen sustainability outcomes in infrastructure planning. The research contributes to current debates on agonistic planning by illustrating that local media provides an agonistic space for development of planning discourses that exist interchangeably with procedural planning engagement.

Theory

Constructing knowledge within and outside the institutionalized spaces of the planning practice

Mouffe (2013) argues that consensus-driven governance sidelines conflicting perspectives, resulting in a risk of societal relations collapsing into antagonism. In planning, applications of the Mouffean critique of consensus politics have highlighted the tendency of communicative planning to obscure inequalities and marginalization (Metzger 2018). Consensus-based approaches, such as communicative planning, involve a broad range of stakeholders in dialogical participatory processes aimed at finding common ground through collaboration (Sager 2018). Mouffe suggests that focus on delivering consensus disregards the reality of political conflict which is present in any democratic context. Rather than marginalizing voices to achieve consensus, she advocates for bringing conflicts into the public sphere to transform antagonisms into productive agonistic engagement (Mouffe 2013; Metzger 2018). Agonistic engagement is defined as 'struggle between adversaries' aimed at achieving discursive hegemony (Mouffe 2014, 20).

Agonism provides a practical lens for examining the conflictual tendencies that emerge in the consensus-driven planning practice (Pløger 2017). Scholars such as Hillier (2016) and Forester (2012) suggest that agonistic dynamics are inherent to planning, occurring alongside the collaborative and consensus-seeking efforts. Pløger (2023, 1635) discusses the 'contingency' of planning decisions, highlighting that agonistic participation indicates that planning decisions by default expect 'disruptions, future ambiguity and uncertain effects'; it may then be that the contingencies of decision-making are what enables emerging re-interpretations of sustainable development to take hold.

Forester's (2012, 12) work on the 'micro-politics of planning' emphasizes the daily challenges planners face as intermediaries situated between collaboration and conflict: he argues that planners can be positioned 'in between' groups with deep-seated mistrust and little mutual regard. Forester consequently explores how planning practitioners engage with stakeholders' conflicting discourses, interpreting tone, jargon, and context while striving to create common ground. His analysis underscores the complexities

practitioners face as they attempt to negotiate consensus within an agonistic landscape. Legacy et al. (2019) expand on agonistic analyses of planning by situating agonistic and collaborative engagement within the broader neoliberal, pro-growth planning framework. They argue that neoliberal planning can co-opt stakeholder inclusion, reducing it to a means of deflecting or delaying opposition rather than fostering genuine dialogue. Exemplifying this implied tokenism, public engagement commonly occurs within top-down, late-stage, and quasi-legal processes such as public inquiries, limiting meaningful participation. Owens and Cowell (2011) and Smyth (2021) note that the public inquiry can be used strategically as a space of resistance, even if the inquiry process devalues public contributions compared to those of the expert witnesses.

The institutional privileging of certain viewpoints over others in planning has been analysed through the lens of knowledge marginalization (Smyth 2021). The planning process is deemed better at digesting technical and subject-specific knowledge (e.g. transport planning) over integrated environmental knowledge (e.g. sustainable development) (Smyth 2021). Simultaneously, public participation that takes place within the procedural decision-making process of planning consists of 'multiple logics, identities and conflictual encounters' that are not made visible in the eventual planning decisions (Pløger 2023, 1635). In effect, this can lead to the marginalization of those logics and identities that better integrate localized environmental knowledge. Without agonistic means for engagement, the marginalization of this type of knowledge may lead to unresolved antagonisms within the planning process.

Furthermore, this may lead to the planning struggle overflowing the participatory planning process and entering the sphere of society. It is argued here that local news outlets play a role of a type of an intermediary in mediating the agonistic planning struggle, putting forward discursive statements from stakeholders in an agonistic manner (Rydin 2003). This helps to prevent the collapse of relations into antagonism that might otherwise take place within the planning process. The local media thus plays a role in 'taming' the antagonisms that emerge but are not accommodated by the planning process.

The relationship of media discourse and the planning process remains somewhat unclear. The following section therefore explores local media as a venue for agonistic engagement where diverse knowledges and discourses may circulate outside institutional frameworks, influencing local planning discourses in ways that can both complement or challenge formal planning processes. Importantly, it may be that media discourses shape the planning process by enabling agonistic modes of engagement aimed at producing alternative knowledges of what sustainable development should look like in infrastructure planning, thus contributing to the challenging of existing growth-driven plans.

Local media as a space for contested planning discourses

Due to the role that local media has in ensuring local elites are accountable and that local issues are explored critically (Franklin 2006), exploring how and to what extent local planning issues are covered is of high importance. While traditional news sources have struggled with maintaining levels of readership, newspapers with online platforms remain influential on local level both through serving as community forums and because they are read by local elites (Pollock et al. 2024). Given that planning implementation is

often intensely local, examining local press coverage of planning debates can provide valuable insight into stakeholder perspectives and priorities. Media's agenda-setting role influences public discourse on planning, as policy actors and other stakeholders leverage it to shape public narratives (McCombs and Shaw 1972; McCombs 2004). News values help editors and journalists decide what is newsworthy (Brighton and Foy 2007), while organizational routines and relationships with sources influence the framing of planning issues (Lewis, Williams, and Franklin 2008).

Community structure theory provides a bottom-up lens through which the influence of the local community on shaping news coverage can be explored (Pollock et al. 2024). In effect, this can be seen as challenging the agenda-setting theory's top-down approach or, as done here, it can be considered as part of the complex dynamic of how the media comes to represent discourses through both mechanisms of agenda-setting and the inclusion of community voices. Local communities hold a stake in local planning matters. Considering the notion of agonistic struggle for ideological dominance (Mouffe 2013), an actively participating community can thus be presumed to engage with local news sources to voice resistance to top-down plans. In the process of getting their views across in the media, local stakeholders have to negotiate the logic of the news values and editorial priorities.

While planning scholarship has not examined the role of media as an enabler of agonistic engagement, a number of analyses discussing journalism within planning scholarship emerged during the 2000s and after. These draw on environmental and policy discourses that emerged from the 1990s onwards (Dryzek 1997; Hajer 1997). For example, Rydin and Pennington (2001) explored the role that local media plays in relation to environmental issues, highlighting points of contestation such as green spaces and air quality, with focus on how the media influences collective action on environmental problems. Clifford (2006) looked at how planners and planning are represented in the British press and concluded that media discourses reflected negatively on the public image of planning at the time. Gunder (2011) explored the role of the media culture in producing future imaginaries for what urban developments should look like. More recent approaches have moved to exploring social media, conceptualizing its usefulness for participatory planning (Kleinhans, Van Ham, and Evans-Cowley 2015; Potts et al. 2024), and whether legacy media can expand the accessibility of planning debates for stakeholders (Margalit 2022). Olesen and Carter (2018) highlight the tendency of the media to align with pro-growth development discourses whereby planning regulation is considered as a barrier to growth.

According to Gunder (2011), various stakeholders including interest groups, corporations, planners, and policymakers, employ media strategies to shape public opinion on planning matters. Despite this, over the past decade there has been limited discussion around how the implementation of agreed policies and plans is covered by news media and who participates in the debates that ensue. Exploring local news is argued here to be useful in considering the agonistic contestation clearly present in planning and the 'intensely local dynamics of planning conflicts' (Inch 2015, 420). Thinking agonistically can help to accommodate ongoing conflict, domination and non-reciprocity that often characterize planning processes and stakeholder engagement (Hillier 2016). The media has an interest in covering planning related antagonisms and is thus relevant to considering the discourses that constitute planning processes through the agonistic

lens: Rydin (2003, 11) highlights the tendency of the news media to 'foster a climate of conflict rather than co-operation'. What this means for local planning struggles has not been explored. Media coverage of planning matters offers rich and detailed data for considering contestation and thus, utilizing media discourses for analytical purposes offers a useful avenue for researchers interested in agonistic relationalities and how these influence the meaning of sustainability in the planning practice.

Furthermore, considering that decisions and policies are influenced by narratives in the media (Pollock et al. 2024), which voices participate in the construction of planning discourses in the local news is worth considering in some more detail. While elite actors such as political decisionmakers influence the agenda setting process, this section has suggested that local stakeholders can also contribute to the narratives that are published. How they may do so in relation to local planning struggles remains unclear. The following section proposes that exploring how planning struggles are constructed in and through the local media can be done through adopting a discourse analytical approach.

Methods

Discourses and storylines

Critiques of sustainable development highlight it as an empty signifier that can host whatever meaning is given to it by a given hegemonic discourse (Atkins 2018; Brown 2016). This indicates that the meaning of sustainable development can vary depending on context and institutional framing: different interpretations may be given more, or less space depending on whether the platform is the planning inquiry, or the local media. Discourses provide a lens for exploring the social construction of knowledge that occurs not only within formal institutional spaces, like planning inquiries, but also outside them, enabling the assessment of how competing ideas come to permeate the hegemonic planning discourse. Therefore, adopting a discursive research methodology is deemed apt to examine how the meaning of sustainable development operationalized by the planning process might become contested in the media discourse.

To investigate local media as a venue where planning discourses are shaped by various stakeholders, discourse is viewed as a means to express thought, intentions, values, and proposed actions (Rydin 2003). Rooted in the Foucauldian conceptualization of discourse, language is seen as a system through which actors actively construct, rather than merely describe, the world (Hajer 1997). This perspective positions discourse as a tool for examining how the privileging or marginalization of different knowledges results from power flows. Fairclough, Mulderrig, and Wodak (2011) argue that researching discourse requires attention to be paid to these relational flows: what comes to be accepted as sustainable is shaped by underlying power structures.

To operationalize the focus on meaning-making through agonistic interactions, this research uses Hajer's (1997) discourse coalition approach to categorize information. Hajer (1997) defines discourse coalitions as loosely formed groups of individuals who share certain interests within institutional contexts, for example, conservation, planning, or business interests. Individuals in these coalitions participate in the construction of storylines which are defined as generalized narratives that simplify complex topics, facilitating shared participation in discourses across coalitions. Here, with a focus on local

media as the subject of investigation, Forester's concept of an intermediary is applied to media itself. Local media is viewed as an intermediary that interprets and represents storylines advanced by discourse coalitions according to its own logic. The notion of media logic is taken to refer to the norms and processes directing the construction of narratives in the press (Altheide 2004). Media logic, which encompasses aspects such as format, grammar, and tone, plays an important role in how stories are selected, organized, and presented to be recognized as news (Altheide 2004). This further influences how discourse coalitions construct and promote their storylines, with local media both reflecting and shaping these narratives.

Content analysis and data collection

Content analysis is widely employed in the field of journalism studies. It can be used to explore how narratives are constructed, agendas set, and whose voices are prioritized. The method is useful for large textual datasets, and enables the identification of themes, framings and actors that can then be qualitatively analysed. To aid the collection of data for analysis, the study initially developed a coding frame for the data collection (Schreier 2013). This was focused on identifying discourse coalitions and storylines, framings of the M4CaN from the headlines, subheadings and the first paragraph, mentions of sustainability or associated ideas, and on the identification of participating actors.

Data collection was conducted using the Nexis UK database, which provided access to most British and Welsh national, regional, and local newspapers. Although some sources, like BBC Wales, are not included in the database, this limitation did not impact the study, as the research focused specifically on contested notions of sustainability within the local news media. The relevant local outlets were available through the database. The sample was designed to include two South Wales news outlets that provided significant regional coverage of the M4CaN proposal. The sampling strategy also accounted for the fluidity of discourse coalitions by covering a time span from 2013 to 2019 (Metze and Dodge 2016). In 2013, the Welsh Government set the agenda for the planning discourse by publishing a consultation into the black route. In 2019, the case was cancelled by the first minister Mark Drakeford, therefore providing a suitable end point to the data collection.

South Wales Argus, being the leading newspaper for the Newport area directly affected by the black route plan, held a substantial local focus on the case. During the research period, the paper published 866 articles on the M4CaN, identified using the key words 'M4 relief road', as the case was most commonly referred to in the press. Wales Online, a Wales-wide platform covering the area impacted by the road proposal, provided equally considerable coverage of the case. Using the same key words, 719 articles were identified. The sampling strategy involved analysing three articles per month during the period of 2013 and 2019. An initial pilot study was conducted to identify recurring themes, storylines, and actor voices in both newspapers. During the pilot, three discourse coalitions clearly emerged from the data and were thus added to the coding sheet:

(1) Environmental discourse coalition, consisting of actors focused on protecting the Gwent Levels from the motorway development,
(2) Economic discourse coalition, hosting actors from the Welsh business lobby,

(3) Social discourse coalition, made up of local politicians and community groups voca-
    lizing concerns about local development, jobs or health (e.g. air and noise pollution).
    Actors were located along the proposed new route.

The coding enabled the examination of how the different coalitions and storylines
intersected and were developed relationally by different actors reacting to what was
already circulating in the news platforms. This further illuminated any attempts to
insert alternative meanings to the concept of sustainable development by actors belong-
ing to different organizational contexts. Given discourse analysis's focus not only on what
is made visible through discourse, but also in what is left unsaid (Fairclough, Mulderrig,
and Wodak 2011), the coding process also highlighted overlooked narratives and story-
lines that struggled to gain traction in the media.

It should be noted that media representation is perceived to be inherently subjective.
Here, this subjectivity has been contextualized through an ongoing discussion on how
the news is shaped by editorial practices, the news logic and the notion of media as an
agonistic intermediary illuminating certain discourses and arguments while leaving
others outside its public platform. Thus far, this paper has argued that local news
media serves as a significant arena for developing discourses about local planning
issues. The following section turns to analysis, exploring how local media shaped the
planning discourse and the extent to which stakeholders worked to influence the
meaning of sustainable development through media engagement in the case of the
M4CaN.

Results: contested sustainabilities in devolved infrastructure planning
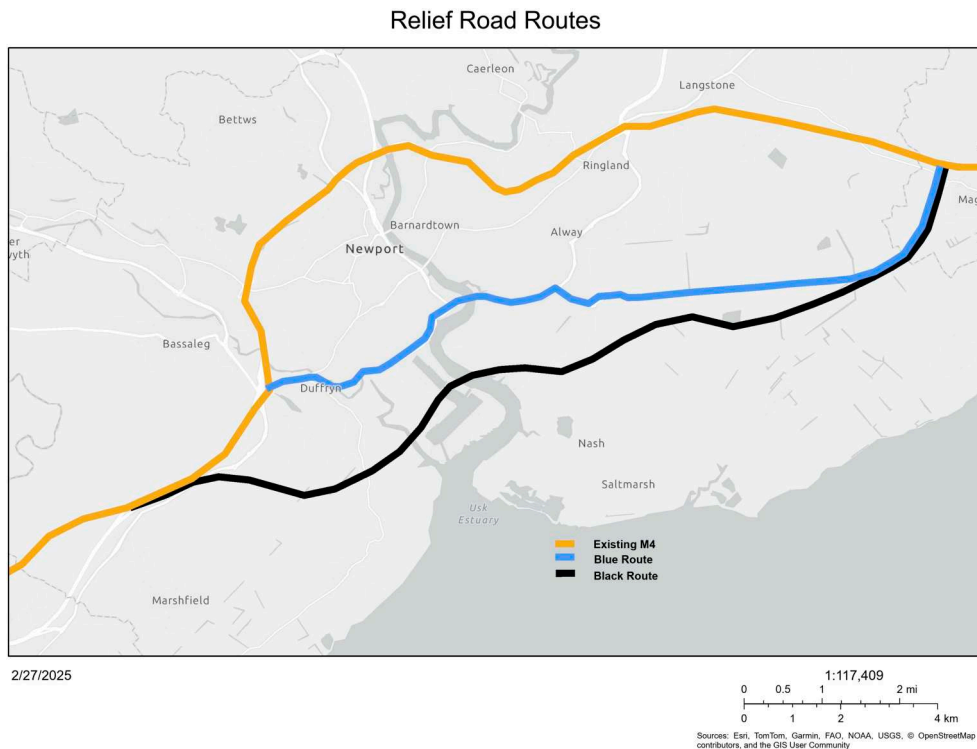
Discourse coalitions and storylines

The M4CaN case study was chosen because it provided a highly illustrative context for
exploring the research questions by offering an example of a contingent planning
decision influenced by an overt agonistic stakeholder dynamic. The case study involved
a value conflict, which manifested through a discursive struggle over the meaning of sus-
tainable development. The M4CaN project emerged during a period of policy transition
in Wales, as sustainable development became more embedded in Welsh legislation
through the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (FGA). As a result, the
project was informally regarded as a test case for the new sustainability legislation
(Smyth 2021). Consequently, stakeholders with varying interests emerged to vocalize
either their support or resistance to the project. Supporters argued that the proposed
new stretch of motorway was critical to Wales' economic interests as it offered prospects
of future economic growth, while opponents defended the ecology of the Gwent Levels,
which would have been compromised by the new road. The findings highlight a prevalent
agonistic dynamic which meant that the discourse coalitions responded to existing story-
lines relationally, finding common ground while subtly advancing the argument towards
their favoured meaning of sustainability.

The prevailing discourse in the news linked the road plan strongly with economic
growth, reflecting a familiar narrative that justifies road investment as an economic cat-
alyst (Magoutas et al. 2023). The existing road was described as '*a foot on the windpipe of*

the South Wales economy' (SWA 2013; SWA 2019), echoing a phrase originally used by David Cameron about the existing road infrastructure in 2013. This framing persisted, frequently cited in press coverage even after the project's cancellation. Opposing this economic narrative, one discourse coalition formed around protecting the Gwent Levels, while another one came to consist of local actors raising place-based concerns such as job access and the impacts of air pollution on community health. These were labelled as the environmental and social discourse coalition, respectively, while the hegemonic narrative was supported by actors loosely based in the economic discourse coalition. The social discourse coalition included local politicians and community advocates from along the proposed route. The clearest divide in arguments and storyline attachment was evident between the environmental and economic discourse coalitions. The storylines that were identified alongside the three discourse coalitions were focused on two road development options, 'black' and 'blue' routes (Figure 1), and the alternative of public transport development. The latter was named the 'sustainable transport' storyline. Table 1 summarizes the most prominent storylines identified, illustrating which discourse coalitions participated in their construction and in what way. Table 1 pays attention to the relational dynamics of storyline construction and the influence of media's agonistic quality in enabling community voices.

The analysis illustrated that both the proponents and objectors of the black route plan actively engaged with local media during the formal planning process, actively challenging each others' definitions of sustainability in an agonistic manner.

Figure 1. Map illustration of the black and blue route options (Webb 2025 [used with permission]).

Table 1. Summary of media analysis, including discourse coalitions and storylines identified.

Storyline	Key characteristics	Supporting discourse coalitions and actors	Role of media
Black route	• Agenda-setting storyline: the Welsh Government's preferred route (e.g. WO 01/11/2015, SWA 29/03/2018) • Emblem of economic growth: Wales will '*miss out on hundreds of millions of pounds of future investment*' without the new M4 (CBI Wales, WO 30/04/2016) • Black route interchangeably referred to as 'relief road' (e.g. SWA 16/01/2014), adding to the sense that the road was an urgent means to relieve congestion and bring 'relief' to drivers and the economy	• Economic coalition: CBI Wales, South Wales Chamber of Commerce, Welsh Conservatives, ministers and other political figures from both the British parliament and government (e.g. David Cameron PM, Paul Flynn MP for Newport West) • Social coalition: Newport-based actors (e.g. politicians) more in favour of black route than the blue route	• Follows agenda set by the Welsh Government's consultation on the route options published in 2013, e.g. through use of headlines repeating WG messaging: '*Welsh Government sets course for M4 relief road in Newport*' (SWA 26/06/2013) • Most coverage (44%) leads with economic framing of the M4CaN plan (either in headline or first paragraph, or both), supporting the angle on black route as necessary for economic growth
Blue route	• Emerged as a reaction to the agenda set by the Welsh Government: route is put forward by an independent thinktank & a transport expert not affiliated with WG, '*Alternative to M4 relief road proposed by transport expert*' (SWA 08/12/2013) • Framed as a cost-effective alternative and as the environmentally friendlier option improving existing road infrastructure along a route that does not compromise the integrity of the Gwent Levels ecosystem: '*The Blue Route would deliver what is needed at a much lower cost and with significantly less impact on the environment.*' (SWA 08/12/2013) • Addressed concerns around the black route absorbing all spending powers, leaving nothing for regional transport: '*… focusing a significant proportion of spending on a narrow section of motorway in South East Wales is not an equitable use of resources.*' (WO 05/11/2013) • Enabled a legal challenge by environmental coalition members, arguing that the blue route should have been included in initial WG consultation (e.g. SWA 01/08/2014)	• Economic coalition: Representing small businesses across Wales, FSB favoured the blue route on the grounds of cost-efficiency • Environmental coalition: some in the coalition lent support to blue route to protect the Gwent Levels from development, e.g. CALM: '*Green group backs alternative to Newport M4 relief road*' (SWA 10/12/2013), an example of agonistic storyline attachment. • Social coalition: Actors representing the Newport area opposed this storyline, because the communities along the route would '*be very badly affected by noise and pollution problems that upgrading that road would bring.*' (Newport East AM in SWA 02/01/2015).	• Enabled the debate on route options: as the blue route emerged from outside the planning process the media sphere was essential for it to gain traction among stakeholders • The media framed the route through focus on the regional politics of costings by, for example, providing space and quoting politicians in support of the blue route on the grounds of it enabling more equitable regional spending (e.g. SWA 08/08/2014) • The support for blue route coalesced at the same time as the costs of the black route began to shoot up, contributing to the framing of blue route as the more cost-effective alternative: '*M4 relief road bill for this year will be £20 m – even though building work is yet to begin*' (WO 08/10/2015)
Sustainable transport	• This storyline covered a host of different options that were	• Supported by environmental coalition including	• This storyline was left vague: most reporting on local level

(*Continued*)

Table 1. Continued.

Storyline	Key characteristics	Supporting discourse coalitions and actors	Role of media
	discussed as sustainable. No strong consensus emerged during the period of study as to what exactly was the sustainable transport option • Attempts were made to bring public transport options into discussion: South Wales Metro presented as an alternative to black and blue route. E.g. '*I really feel that public transport and the Metro system should be a really strong focus.*' (Newport East AM in SWA 03/10/2014) • Lack of definition of what is seen as sustainable: '*We advocate the Welsh Government looks at sustainable transport solutions – but the Government seems determined to build a road. There is a reasonable, viable alternative that enhances the existing road system around Newport which would be significantly cheaper and not cost the earth.*' (CALM campaign in WO 05/11/2013) This could be taken as an endorsement for the blue route as the sustainable option. • Some highlighted the rights of future generations in line with FGA: '*[M4 diversion] would use a significant amount of the money, which we think would be better invested for the benefit of our children and grandchildren, in truly sustainable transport improvements […]*' (05/01/2019 SWA)	representatives of the CALM campaign, but not brought up as frequently as the blue route. This may be because members of the environmental coalition recognized that the blue route was more salient as a storyline in the local media. • Support from social coalition included Newport based actors, such as the Newport East AM, who was worried about the social impacts of the blue route, and the environmental impacts of the black route. • Black route supporters highlighted that metro development should take place alongside, not instead of the black route (e.g. CBI in WO 05/03/2014).	consisted of mentions of sustainable transport alternatives without specifying what this might look like. Comments such as '*there are sustainable alternatives and better environmental initiatives that would benefit the whole of Wales […]*' (SWA 14/06/2018) did not draw follow up questions from journalists that would have resulted in actors having to specify what they meant. • There was lack of clear definition for sustainable transport. This meant that attempts to highlight the black route as sustainable were often uncontested: '*Wales does not need a temporary fix but a sustainable long-term solution that strengthens the Welsh economy and gives business the tools and confidence to grow and invest*' (Letter from the Welsh business organizations, published in SWA 16/07/14). This framing of sustainability was not challenged or probed by the media either.

Actors, loosely arranged in the three discourse coalitions, participated in the construction of the sustainability discourse through their attachment to the three competing storylines outlined in Table 1. Attempts were made by each coalition to showcase their preferred storyline as sustainable. While the environmental discourse coalition put forward arguments for strong sustainability rooted in the protection of the ecology of the Gwent Levels, the economic discourse coalition displayed a narrower, weak framing of sustainability that focused on economic growth. Although sustainable development underpins the Welsh planning policy, it is notable that no consensus as to what this meant emerged over the period of the M4CaN development struggle. This is illustrated by the following comment describing the differing interpretations of the FGA by the Future Generations Commissioner, whose role is to advise the public bodies in Wales to promote long-term sustainability, and by the Welsh Government:

' … the commissioner's main point is that the principles of the FGA have been misinter-preted in developing the M4 scheme and insists that unless the scheme is designed to improve 'all four aspects of well-being' then it is not consistent with the principle of sustain-able development. The Welsh Government disputes this: 'sustainable development is defined as the 'process' of improving the four aspects of well-being. The FGA does not mean that every project must contribute equally to each of the wellbeing goals. The duty of the Welsh Government is to maximise its contribution to achieving these goals'.' (WO, 13th Nov 2018)

This highlights a key point of contestation in the discursive struggle over the meaning of sustainable development, arising from legislation that does not provide clear means through which to assess the balance of the different aspects of sustainability. The media's framing supports the prioritization of economic sustainability: the piece is titled '*Black Route is only viable way forward for economic well-being*' and the author aligns himself with the Welsh Government's view on prioritising economic sustainability through focus on economic wellbeing. While the Welsh Government had passed the FGA in 2015, Welsh ministers continued to maintain they considered the M4CaN to be a sustainable solution to the problems presented by the existing M4 route until the cancellation of the project in 2019. This dynamic is exactly what enabled resistance to this prevailing definition of sustainability to emerge.

Media as an avenue for planning participation

The economic interpretation of sustainability by the Welsh Government was supported by the discourse coalition consisting of business actors. This was the coalition that gained the most media space: most organizations in this coalition advocated for the road devel-opment and the route plan put forward by the Welsh Government. Overall, 44% of the articles analysed across both data sources led with an economic framing of the issue, by highlighting economic concerns as a priority in the headline, or in the first paragraph. An example is provided by WO, whose headline on 9th December 2013 gave voice to one of the most vocal supporters of the black route plan, CBI Wales, who argued that the '*M4 Relief [road] will unlock a wave of investment in South Wales*'. The focus on economic growth propelled by road investment thus directed how sustainability came to be inter-preted in relation to M4CaN. The storyline that most clearly channelled sustainability as giving most weight to economic development was that of the black route as outlined in detail in Table 1.

The blue route emerged as an alternative proposal from outside the planning process. This was an important finding enabled by the media analysis as the blue route was not part of the Welsh Government proposal and thus, not formally considered by the plan-ning process. This illustrates media's agonistic tendency to intermediate the debate by creating space for alternatives. Following the black route consultation, the Institute of Welsh Affairs published a joint report with the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport. This outlined an alternative to the black route labelled as the blue route (Figure 1), a phrasing that quickly took on in the public sphere. The blue route received significant attention in the media and formed the basis for a judicial review against the black route pursued by Friends of the Earth Cymru. Illustrating the contested sustainabil-ity of both black and the blue routes, the member of the Welsh Senedd for Newport East argued that '*The black route would cross the Gwent Levels which have huge environmental*

value and a landscape largely unchanged over the centuries. And the blue route would pass through the middle of centres of population with all the pollution and noise issues involved' (SWA 8th October 2015). While perceived by many as the economically sustainable option, the black route would have had a significant impact on environmental sustainability. At the same time, the blue route, predicted to increase traffic close to where people lived in Newport, was perceived to be incompatible with social sustainability.

For the environmental discourse coalition, while the blue route did not offer a sustainable alternative because it would still channel public spending towards road development, it offered an opportunity to shake the credibility of the black route as a storyline of sustainable economic development. Co-opting the economic discourse, a spokesperson for Wildlife Trusts Wales argued that '*borrowing £1.2bn to fund a motorway is bad for the environment and a bad deal for Welsh taxpayers, especially as the Gwent levels are home to so many wildlife species. The Gwent levels bring £67 m worth of benefits – such as flood relief – every year.*' (SWA, 04/11/2013). This ability to utilize the economic framing put forward by others thus granted the environmental coalition more visibility in the overall media discourse. This illustrates how actors from different discourse coalitions took part in storyline development in a relational manner, intersecting and influencing one another. This further illustrates an implicit understanding that the media was more inclined to give space to economic viewpoints. Co-opting into a discourse about economic sustainability to shake the foundations of the hegemonic meaning of sustainability and to create space for environmental consideration in this way can be said to constitute an agonistic form of engagement. Furthermore, thinking through the lens of agonistic relationality helps to decipher how certain meanings became challenged through re-interpretation in the media sphere. The actions of attaching economic significance to the Gwent Levels landscape, challenging the spending on the black route and highlighting a more reasonably priced alternative jointly contributed to the creation of a discourse that supported the political decision to cancel the route in 2019.

Discussion: the role of the news media in illuminating the agonistic quality of planning struggles

The analysis thus far has revealed that while the available options for the development of the meaning of sustainable development in the local media were limited, the outlets nevertheless provided space for agonism. By including the voices of diverse actors, and enabling the construction of alternatives, the local media specifically provided space for agonistic discourse development outside the institutionalized planning process. The blue route serves as a key example of the media's inclusion of alternative proposals for consideration. While the blue route was rejected by the institutionalized planning process, it's continual surfacing in the local media meant that the black route needed to be justified against this second option. The cheaper option of the blue route further called into question the financial sustainability of the Welsh Government's proposal.

Confirming Rydin's (2003) insight into the contested dynamics of media narratives, conflict was found to be the driving force of the local media coverage in the case of M4CaN. However, this was not reflected by open antagonism appearing on the pages of the two newspapers investigated. Instead, actors produced argumentation that took

into account and responded to the opposing coalitions' points of views. The media thus enabled agonism, however, it can be argued that this took place within the limits of the hegemonic pro-growth discourse. This aligns with Swyngedouw's (2018) notion that neoliberal political systems enable agonistic relations and political protest only insofar as these enable the continuation of the status quo. It may then be that the newspapers' editorial preferences and news values do not only shape the argumentative discourse around planning matters but also, the opportunities they create for engagement may prevent the institutionalized procedures of planning participation from collapsing into antagonism. While the media outlets used their power to mediate the framing of the discourse around the issue, and to position certain storylines into relationships with others, it can nevertheless be concluded that local newspapers provided an outlet for planning participation outside the institutionalized planning framework in relation to the case study. This indicates that the local media sphere influences the 'unfinished' planning decision-making as articulated by Pløger (2023). In the case of the M4CaN, agonistic conflict was precisely not contained by the formal decision-making process which had led to a recommendation to go ahead but instead, the discourse conflict that took place outside procedural planning participation created space for an unexpected political decision to cancel the planned development.

Following the prolonged debate regarding the options covered in this article, the Welsh First Minister Mark Drakeford cancelled the M4CaN scheme. Mr Drakeford had been elected to the position in December 2018, following the resignation of the previous First Minister Carwyn Jones, who had been one of the key advocates of M4CaN. Mr Drakeford went against the recommendation of the Planning Inspectorate to cancel the road plan, stating that he

> 'attach[ed] greater weight than the Inspector did to the adverse impacts that the Project would have on the environment. In particular, I attach very significant weight to the fact that the Project would have a substantial adverse impact on the Gwent Levels SSSIs and their reen network and wildlife, and other species, and a permanent adverse impact on the historic landscape of the Gwent Levels' (Drakeford 2019, 6)

This is a significant statement that consciously directs attention away from the planning dispute grounded in the politics of costings and pro-growth development. Owens and Cowell (2011) discuss how policy learning can emerge from discursive conflicts over planning. In the case of the M4CaN, it can be concluded that the local media not only enabled a discursive conflict, but that this also extended the reach of the arguments contesting the sustainability of the black route. Through the agonistic debate in the sphere of the media, the local environmental knowledge concerning the ecology of the Gwent Levels that, to an extent, was rejected by the public inquiry (Smyth 2021), made itself visible in the broader planning discourse. While alternatives to the prioritization of economic sustainability did not become hegemonic in the local media per se, the media's enabling of diverse voices helped to build support for a controversial political decision that, in the end, prioritized a holistic understanding of environmental sustainability over a narrower focus on economic growth.

The findings illustrate the discursive complexity of large-scale infrastructure planning. They align with previous studies identifying the strength of pro-growth development discourses in European planning (Olesen and Carter 2018). At the same time, they illustrate

a more nuanced picture supporting the idea posited by community structure theory that local communities can meaningfully wield their influence upon infrastructure planning through their participation in the media (Pollock et al. 2024). The findings further confirm the hypothesis that local media enables agonistic storyline construction that in the case of M4CaN helped to challenge the meaning of sustainable development initially put forward by the Welsh Government. This is illustrated by the nuanced dynamic of both pro-growth and alternative sustainability discourses that gained visibility over the course of the planning process. The First Minister's eventual prioritization of the environment over development can therefore be seen as enabled by the pluralistic and diverse voices that emerged in the debate on the pages of the local newspapers. The media debates fed into the discussions in the Welsh Senedd, helping to create a more politically receptive context for the cancellation. Bachrach and Baratz (1963) discuss the importance of accounting for not just decision-making processes but also those of non-decision-making. These are the practices that influence community values, political institutions and processes. By their effect they limit the scope of actual decision-making to issues that are regarded as 'safe'. In the case of M4CaN, exploring the media discourses utilizing an agonistic lens revealed that diverse discourses can shape the nondecision-making context, leading to more space for a politician to highlight the importance of considering environmental values over those supported by development.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the lack of utilization of media analysis by the planning scholarship in understanding the agonistic dynamics of constructing sustainable development in infrastructure planning. In exploring what influences unusual planning decisions that prioritize environmental sustainability over prevailing pro-growth development, the paper has contributed to a better understanding of how the agonistic construction of media discourses can influence the re-balancing of economic, social and environmental sustainability in the planning discourse, leading to the abandoning of unsustainable infrastructure projects.

Drawing on Rydin's (2003) argument that the construction of environmental narratives in the media fosters conflict over collaboration, this paper positioned local media as site of agonistic contestation. Local news platforms were argued to act as a space for stakeholders to put forward competing narratives about the proposed development, challenging the existing pro-growth hegemony of infrastructure planning. Utilizing a discursive content analysis, the research found that while the media's overall news logic aligns with pro-economic conceptualizations of sustainability, local media nevertheless allows alternative proposals from outside the formal planning process to surface and gather momentum. In the case of M4CaN, this influenced the political discourse by challenging the prevailing interpretation of sustainability as predominantly economic. This suggests that local media may facilitate a broader range of sustainability knowledge than is typically enabled by the institutionalized planning practice. The findings also indicate that the media can foster agonistic conflict. This may prevent the formation of antagonisms that could otherwise emerge within the planning process. Most European planning systems exist alongside a pluralistic media sphere, it therefore being essential for planning theorists to understand how media discourses can support the

implementation of sustainable planning. Along with recent calls for the planning profession to develop ways to raise awareness about the pitfalls of pro-growth planning and its alternatives (Næss 2023), it would be important for planners to consider how media discourses come to influence planning in profound ways, for example through shaping what is perceived possible, and equally, not possible, for planners to achieve.

While the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 has led to increasing divergence between English and Welsh planning regulation, the First Minister's decision to highlight the importance of the Gwent Levels environment provides a useful illustration of the UK's discretionary planning culture. Thus, in the Welsh case, both discretion and policy ambiguity facilitated the agonistic construction of the sustainability discourse, and its reception by decisionmakers. Since the cancellation of M4CaN, the Welsh policy on road building has been revised so that the criteria to pass new road projects has become tighter (Welsh Government 2023). The events explored here suggest that the devolved government in Wales was able to act upon the diversified discourse around the meaning of sustainable development and that road policy thus far has followed this. While the EU, for example, has embedded a regulatory culture of firm environmental standards and more robust oversight compared to the UK (Cowell et al. 2020), the implementation of sustainable development remains subject to ambiguities on both local and regional level. This research highlights the importance of planning systems to being receptive to alternative meanings embedded in the concept of sustainable development that challenge planning's pro-growth tendency. By necessity, this means that planning must be receptive to resistance, pluralistic knowledges and the agonistic dynamics that emerge in (un)sustainable infrastructure planning. In the future, comparative studies would be helpful in illuminating whether devolved or autonomous governance structures such as elsewhere in the UK or in Spain are more receptive to shifts in definitions of sustainability that emerge in agonistic forums outside procedural planning compared to more centralized planning governance.

Disclosure statement

ORCID

Mirka Virtanen http://orcid.org/0009-0007-3700-2463

References

Altheide, D. 2004. "Media Logic and Political Communication." *Political Communication* 21 (3): 293–296. doi:10.1080/10584600490481307

Atkins, E. 2018. "Dams, Political Framing and Sustainability as an Empty Signifier: The Case of Belo Monte." *Area* 50 (2): 232–239. doi:10.1111/area.12364

Bachrach, P., and M. Baratz. 1963. "Decisions and Nondecisions: An Analytical Framework." *The American Political Science Review* 57 (3): 632–642. doi:10.2307/1952568

Bafarasat, A., and E. Oliveira. 2020. "Disentangling Three Decades of Strategic Spatial Planning in England Through Participation, Project Promotion and Policy Integration." *European Planning Studies* 29 (8): 1375–1392. doi:10.1080/09654313.2020.1863920

Brighton, P., and D. Foy. 2007. *News Values*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Brown, T. 2016. "Sustainability as Empty Signifier: Its Rise, Fall, and Radical Potential." *Antipode* 48 (1): 115–133. doi:10.1111/anti.12164.

Carvalho, A. 2008. "Media(ted) Discourse and Society: Rethinking the Framework of Critical Discourse Analysis." *Journalism Studies (London, England)* 9 (2): 161–177. doi:10.1080/14616700701848162.

Clifford, B. 2006. "Only a Town Planner Would Run a Toxic-Waste Pipeline Through a Recreational Area: Planning and Planners in the British Press." *Town Planning Review* 77 (4): 423–455. doi:10.3828/tpr.77.4.4.

Connelly, S. 2007. "Mapping Sustainable Development as a Contested Concept." *Local Environment* 12 (3): 259–278. doi:10.1080/13549830601183289

Cowell, R., G. Ellis, T. Fischer, T. Jackson, T. Muinzer, and O. Sykes. 2020. "Integrating Planning and Environmental Protection: An Analysis of Post-Brexit Regulatory Styles and Practitioner Attitudes in the UK." *Planning Theory & Practice* 21 (4): 570–590. doi:10.1080/14649357.2020.1801819

Drakeford, M. 2019. "Re: Various schemes and orders in relation to the M4 corridor around Newport. Letter. First Minister of Wales, Welsh Government. Accessed November 22, 2024. https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-06/m4-corridor-around-newport-decision-letter.pdf

Dryzek, J. 1997. *The Politics of the Earth: Environmental Discourses*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Fairclough, N., J. Mulderrig, and R. Wodak. 2011. "Critical Discourse Analysis." In *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction*, edited by T. A. V. Dijk, and E. Sage, 357–378. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Forester, J. 2012. "Learning to Improve Practice: Lessons from Practice Stories and Practitioners' Own Discourse Analyses (or Why Only the Loons Show Up)." *Planning Theory & Practice* 13 (1): 11–26. doi:10.1080/14649357.2012.649905.

Franklin, B. 2006. *Local Journalism and Local Media: Making the Local News*. London: Routledge.

Goulden, M., T. Ryley, and R. Dingwall. 2014. "Beyond 'Predict and Provide': Uk transport, the Growth Paradigm and Climate Change." *Transport Policy* 32: 139–147. doi:10.1016/j.tranpol.2014.01.006

Gunder, M. 2011. "A Metapsychological Exploration of the Role of Popular Media in Engineering Public Belief on Planning Issues." *Planning Theory (London, England)* 10 (4): 325–343. doi:10.1177/1473095211413754.

Hajer, M. 1997. *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process*. Oxford: Clarendon.

Hillier, J. 2016. "Agon'izing Over Consensus: Why Habermasian Ideals Cannot be `Real'." *Planning Theory (London, England)* 2 (1): 37–59. doi:10.1177/1473095203002001005.

Inch, A. 2015. "Ordinary Citizens and the Political Cultures of Planning: In Search of the Subject of a new Democratic Ethos." *Planning Theory* 14 (4): 404–424. doi:10.1177/1473095214536172

Kleinhans, R., M. Van Ham, and J. Evans-Cowley. 2015. "Using Social Media and Mobile Technologies to Foster Engagement and Self-Organization in Participatory Urban Planning and Neighbourhood Governance." *Planning, Practice & Research* 30 (3): 237–247. doi:10.1080/02697459.2015.1051320.

Legacy, C., J. Metzger, W. Steele, and E. Gualini. 2019. "Beyond the Post-Political: Exploring the Relational and Situated Dynamics of Consensus and Conflict in Planning." *Planning Theory* 18 (3): 273–281. doi:10.1177/1473095219845628

Lewis, J., A. Williams, and B. Franklin. 2008. "A Compromised Fourth Estate? UK news Journalism, Public Relations and News Sources." *Journalism Studies (London, England)* 9 (1): 1–20. doi:10.1080/14616700701767974.

Magoutas, A., D. Manolopoulos, G. Tsoulfas, and M. Koudeli. 2023. "Economic Impact of Road Transportation Infrastructure Projects: The Case of Egnatia Odos Motorway." *European Planning Studies* 31 (4): 780–801. doi:10.1080/09654313.2022.2082243

Margalit, T. 2022. "Israeli Real-Estate Buzz - Planning Discourse and Media Coverage." *Planning Theory & Practice* 23 (3): 349–367. doi:10.1080/14649357.2022.2051593.

McCombs, M. 2004. *Setting the Agenda: The Mass Media and Public Opinion*. Cambridge: Blackwell Pub.

McCombs, M., and D. Shaw. 1972. "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36 (2): 176–187. doi:10.1086/267990

Metze, T., and J. Dodge. 2016. "Dynamic Discourse Coalitions on Hydro-Fracking in Europe and the United States." *Environmental Communication* 10 (3): 365–379. doi:10.1080/17524032.2015.1133437.

Metzger, J. 2018. "Postpolitics and Planning." In *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*, edited by M. in Gunder, A. Madanipour, and V. Watson, 180–193. Abingdon: Routledge.

Mouffe, C. 2013. *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*. London: Verso.

Mouffe, C. 2014. Democratic politics and conflict: An agonistic approach. *Political power reconsidered: state power and civic activism between legitimacy and violence*, pp.17-29.

Nadin, V., and A. Fernández-Maldonado. 2023. "Spatial Planning Systems in Europe: Multiple Trajectories." *Planning Practice & Research* 38 (5): 625–638. doi:10.1080/02697459.2023.2258568

Næss, P. 2023. "Urban Sustainability Responsibilities of the European Planning Profession in the Next Decades." *European Planning Studies* 31 (11): 2342–2353. doi:10.1080/09654313.2023.2217857

Olesen, K., and H. Carter. 2018. "Planning as a Barrier for Growth: Analysing Storylines on the Reform of the Danish Planning Act." *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 36 (4): 689–707. doi:10.1177/2399654417719285

Owens, S., and R. Cowell. 2011. *Land and Limits: Interpreting Sustainability in the Planning Process*. Second edition. London: Routledge.

Pløger, J. 2017. "Conflict and Agonism." In *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*, edited by M. Gunder, A. Madanipour, and V. Watson, 264–275. Abingdon: Routledge.

Pløger, J. 2023. "Contingency, Decision, Unfinished Planning: Let's Quarrel More!." *European Planning Studies* 31 (8): 1634–1650. doi:10.1080/09654313.2022.2088229

Pollock, J., M. Crowley, S. Govindarajan, A. Lewis, A. Marta, R. Purandare, and J. Sparano. 2024. "US Nationwide Multi-City Media Coverage of COVID-19 Responses: Community Structure Theory, Belief System, and a "Violated Way of Life"." *Journal of Health Communication* 29 (4): 256–264. doi:10.1080/10810730.2024.2324845.

Potts, R., J. Riddle, J. Hollander, and M. Hartt. 2024. "The Online Conversion Framework: Understanding Antagonism, Planning Theory, and Social Media." *Planning Theory (London, England)* 24 (2): 115–140. doi:10.1177/14730952241249799.

Rydin, Y. 2003. *Conflict, Consensus, and Rationality in Environmental Planning: An Institutional Discourse Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Rydin, Y. 2021. *Theory in Planning Research*. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Rydin, Y., and M. Pennington. 2001. "The Discourses of the Prisoners' Dilemma: The Role of the Local Press in Environmental Policy." *Environmental Politics* 10 (3): 48–71. doi:10.1080/714000551.

Sager, T. 2018. "Communicative Planning." In *The Routledge Handbook of Planning Theory*, edited by M. Gunder, A. Madanipour, and V. Watson, 93–104. London: Routledge.

Schreier, M. 2013. "Qualitative Content Analysis." In *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, edited by U. Flick, 170–183. London: SAGE Publications.

Smyth, C. 2021. "Tick the box and Move on': Compartmentalization and the Treatment of the Environment in Decision-Making Processes." *Journal of Law and Society* 48 (3): 410–433. doi:10.1111/jols.12309

South Wales Argus. 2013. Prime Minister David Cameron Says It's Time to Get on with M4 Relief Road. [online] 1 November. Accessed June 23, 2025. https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/10780574.prime-minister-david-cameron-says-its-time-to-get-on-with-m4-relief-road/.

South Wales Argus. 2019. M4 Newport Relief Road Timeline. [online] 3 June. Accessed June 23, 2025. https://www.southwalesargus.co.uk/news/17679903.m4-newport-relief-road-timeline/.

Swyngedouw, E. 2018. *Promises of the Political: Insurgent Cities in a Post-Political Environment*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Welsh Government. 2023. Welsh Government Response to the Roads Review. Accessed December 4, 2024. https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/pdf-versions/2023/2/2/1676385038/welsh-government-response-roads-review.pdf

Zanotto, J. 2020. The Role of Discourses in Enacting Neoliberal Urbanism: Understanding the Relationship Between Ideology and Discourse in Planning. *Planning Theory (London, England)* 19(1), pp. 104-126. doi:10.1177/1473095219898876