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Ideology and institutional change: the case of the English National Planning Policy framework

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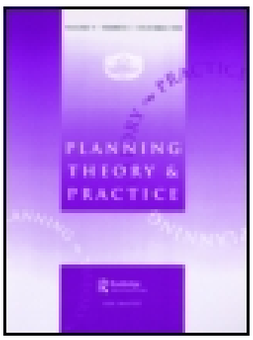

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Ideology and Institutional Change: The Case of the English National Planning Policy Framework

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ABSTRACT

This paper deploys a discursive institutionalist framework to explore how various categories of ideas – from ideology, to programme, to policy – interact to shape the planning policymaking process. Using the emergence of the 2012 National Planning Policy Framework in England as a case study, the role of the political ideology of the leadership of a political party (as distinct from, but related to, the broader category of 'neoliberalism') in shaping and legitimising planning reform is analysed. It is shown that it is not only the political ideological legacy of a political party and how it melds with the prevailing paradigmatic orthodoxy (such as neoliberalism) that matters in framing planning reform, but that the way in which ideas are communicated and consulted on in the policymaking process is also significant.

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Introduction

Although English post-war planning has always had a market-supportive role, its history since the early 1980s can be read as a series of attempts by governments to more closely align its institutional design with market forces (e.g. Allmendinger, 2016; Tewdwr-Jones, 2012; Thornley, 1991). Allmendinger and Haughton (2013) contend that this has been a story of the *neoliberalisation* of planning via a series of periods marked by shifts in the scalar distribution of planning powers and the degree and design of planning regulation, but connected via broad continuities derived from "the role of neoliberalism as a political-economic governance ideology" (p. 23) and an attendant focus on the role of planning to promote growth. Lord and Tewdwr-Jones (2014) broadly agree with this analysis, arguing that English planning has undergone successive waves of neoliberal reform that have been framed by governments as necessary to 'fix' planning, which is criticised as a "chronic obstacle to growth" (p. 346). This 'scapegoating' of planning as a bureaucratic barrier that impedes beneficial market-driven development outcomes has been characteristic of neoliberal planning reform in many jurisdictions (Gunder, 2016). However, the precise form this neoliberalisation of planning has taken across the globe is by no means universally the same (Baeten, 2018). Various analyses explore how the cultural, political, economic or legal legacies in individual jurisdictions have melded with a general governmental neoliberal rationality to produce distinct waves of planning reform that nevertheless are argued to share family resemblances, such as a prioritisation of economic growth, efficiency and competitiveness over social goals (e.g. Davoudi et al., 2020; Inch, 2018; Miessner, 2020; Olesen, 2014). Although not the only way of approaching the

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concept (Newman, 2014), the accounts referenced here generally acknowledge the role of neoliberalism as a form of *ideology* that frames, conditions and legitimises neoliberalisation processes with varying outcomes. Such studies are therefore generally careful to avoid the implication that neoliberalism is an ideational monolith and instead emphasise its contingent and variegated expressions while seeking to trace its influence via similarities and continuities across scales, spaces and periods.

In a comparison of neoliberalisation processes and spatial planning in France, Germany and the Netherlands, Waterhout et al. (2013) argue that what makes the English experience distinctive is that it is prone to "more radical or disruptive decisions" (p. 157) concerning planning reform. This paper investigates one particular period of 'disruptive decisions' in England to examine the role of political ideology and associated ideas in influencing the policymaking process that resulted in the National Planning Policy Framework ('NPPF') in 2012. This set out a new planning framework for England and was a key output of the post-2010 Conservative-led coalition government's political ideological project for planning at the time. Upon the publication of the draft consultation NPPF in 2011, it was seen by some as a means by which central government could indirectly compel local authorities and local communities to consent to more housing to support economic growth in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. This central state disciplining of local authorities for perceived failures in plan-making and housing delivery was in tension with a parallel emphasis on 'localism' and community empowerment. The draft NPPF became the focus of a vociferous and public dispute between the Conservative ministers with responsibility for planning, and the Conservative Party's own supporters in both Parliament and rural areas who were concerned about the impact of new housing development on the English countryside. This disruptive controversy seemed to reflect the tensions in the ideology of the Conservative Party as it related to planning at the time. It is a timely moment to revisit this topic because, at the time of writing, the government is once again considering introducing major reforms of the planning system in England (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government [MHCLG], 2020). As with the original NPPF consultation, the potential impact of those elements of the proposed reforms that are aimed at increasing housing delivery have been the focus of a political backlash against the government from its own members and supporters who are concerned about the impact of new housing development on rural shires (Walker, 2020).

The paper takes a more fine-grained view of ideology than that offered by an abstract conception of neoliberalism. Following Freeden (1996), ideology is here defined sociologically (rather than necessarily pejoratively) as a form of group political thinking that can be analysed in terms of a morphology of contested political concepts (such as liberty, equality and justice) that are articulated differently in various political ideologies and by which groups interpret and attempt to exert control over political reality. The paper builds on previous work examining the relationship between the political ideology of the Conservative Party (which was a distinct amalgam of neoliberal and conservative concepts) and planning reform in England after 2010 (e.g. Inch & Shepherd, 2020; Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2018; Tait & Inch, 2016) and complements two previous papers in which I examined the relationship between the particular political ideological orientation of English governments and national planning reform (Shepherd, 2018, 2020). These studies explored the relationship between contesting political ideologies and national planning policy and law, and argued that institutional change in planning is "partly a function of ideological competition over the proper meanings of the concepts which it shares with competing ideologies" (Shepherd, 2020, p. 7). However, the national policymaking *process* by which ideas that are related to abstract political ideologies found their way into the institution of English planning to create change in the coalition period has rarely been explored (although see Lord & Tewdwr-Jones, 2018).

A discursive institutionalist framework (Schmidt, 2008a, 2008b, 2014) is deployed to address this lacuna. Discursive institutionalism differentiates between different levels of ideas – from deep philosophical or ideological ideas, to meso-level programmatic ideas, to more dynamic policy ideas – to examine how they frame and legitimise institutional change. Importantly, analysis of the agency of ideas entails study of how they are communicated. By using a discursive institutionalist framework, this paper explores how the political ideology of the Conservative Party leadership provided a broad legitimising, yet contradictory, conceptual frame for its programme for planning and the policy ideas enshrined in the NPPF, as well as how the discursive strategies by which these ideas were communicated in the policymaking process influenced the final document. Following the levels of ideas from abstract ideology to the passage of specific policy ideas through the fraught process which resulted in the NPPF, the analysis explores how ideology is not totalising but must 'suture together' contradictory arguments (Hall, 2011, p. 713) and seek to exert control over political meanings when challenged.

This paper therefore makes a theoretical contribution by deploying a discursive institutionalist framework combined with a morphological understanding of ideology to explore how various 'levels' of ideas – from ideology, to programme, to policy – interact to shape the planning policymaking process within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of planning. A distinction is drawn between neoliberalism as an overarching paradigm and the neoliberalisation of the ideologies of particular political parties in order to explore the role of these ideologies in accommodating neoliberal imperatives in different ways while being reshaped by, as well as reshaping, them. The various ways in which the distinct ideological traditions of political parties meld with neoliberal impulses are presented as being one factor contributing to the variegated nature of neoliberalism, with particular implications for changes in planning programmes and policies in different political and cultural contexts. By deploying this theoretical framework in an analysis of the emergence of the NPPF in England, this paper not only focuses analytical attention on the role of the morphology of the particular political ideology of a political party (as distinct from, but related to, the broader category of 'neoliberalism') in shaping and legitimising planning reform, but also on how the ways in which associated ideas are communicated can significantly influence the policymaking process to the extent that aspects of the legitimising political ideology are challenged. It is shown, therefore, that it is not only the political ideological legacy of a political party and how it melds with the prevailing paradigmatic orthodoxy (such as neoliberalism) that matters in framing planning reform, but that the way in which ideas are communicated and consulted on in the policymaking process is also significant. Although the paper focuses on the NPPF in England to explore these themes, the theoretical framework has potential to be deployed in other contexts to explore the relationship between ideology and planning in jurisdictions with different political, ideological and planning traditions.

The next part of the paper briefly summarises the discursive institutionalist theoretical framework. This is followed by a summary of the programme of planning reform that was developed by the Conservative Party in the years leading up to the 2010 general election. The process of the drafting and publication of the 2012 NPPF is then examined through an account of the discursive interactions that shaped this process. There then follows some critical reflections on the nature of institutional change for planning at the time.

Ideas and Institutional Change

Discursive institutionalism[1] is an umbrella term for forms of institutionalist analysis that explicitly acknowledge the role of ideas in shaping institutions and influencing institutional change (Béland, 2009; Blyth, 1997; Campbell, 1998; P. Hall, 1993). That any such acknowledgment should be

regarded as remarkable enough to require its own category may seem surprising. However, discursive institutionalism is part of a wider 'turn to ideas' in political science, which should be seen in the context of a reaction against the suspicion of interpretive forms of analysis present in some schools of the discipline that emphasise rational calculations or material interests over ideational processes[2] (Blyth, 2013; Gofas & Hay, 2010b; Béland & Cox, 2011, p. 6). Through turning to ideas and how they are communicated, discursive institutionalist analyses seek to overcome the more static framing of other forms of new institutionalism which have been criticised for their difficulties with satisfactorily explaining institutional change (Thelen & Conran, 2016).

Ideas in discursive institutionalist studies are generally held to operate at three levels of generality with each level performing differing roles (Mehta, 2011). Schmidt (2008a, 2008b, 2014) describes these levels of idea as policy, programme and philosophy. Policy ideas are specific policies or policy solutions. Policy programmes (or programmatic ideas) define the problems, normative goals and the methods to be applied. Philosophical ideas are the public philosophies, worldviews or ideologies that frame the policy programmes and policies. For Schmidt (2016), forms of neoliberalism equate to the philosophical or 'background' level of ideas which may find expression via government programmes and policies, although there are many other potential candidates depending on the empirical context, such as the belief that local government is more attuned to local needs than more remote tiers of government (Mehta, 2011, p. 27).

However, this kind of framing does not clearly distinguish between the broader saturation of political ideas through the fabric of society so that they become part of 'common sense' as described by the concept of hegemony – defined here as "a central system of practices, meanings and values, which we can properly call dominant and effective" (Williams, 2005, pp. 37–38) – and how variegated forms of neoliberalism arise via a melding of *more or less* hegemonic neoliberal impulses with the distinct political ideological traditions of political parties. This paper therefore distinguishes between the broader ideational context of neoliberalism as the dominant political and economic paradigm, and the particular political ideology of the Conservative Party leadership in the early coalition government period (see also Inch & Shepherd, 2020). This is to examine how the political ideology of the Conservative Party of the time was in support of, and in tension with, aspects of the neoliberal paradigm with significant implications for the programmes and policies of planning reform of the period.

If discursive institutionalism calls on ideas to help explain institutional change, then it must provide an account of how change occurs. Schmidt (2002), following P. Hall (1993), identifies a typology of ideational and institutional change whereby 'renewal' occurs when new policy instruments and policy ideas are introduced but without significant change to the programmatic objectives and ideals of policy, and 'recasting' occurs when new policy instruments are accompanied by adjustments to the programmatic objectives but no major adjustment in core philosophical ideals (see Table 1). Where there is change to policies, programmatic objectives as well as overarching ideals or philosophy, this is described as revolutionary or 'third order' change. The example provided by Schmidt and Hall of third order change is the move from a Keynesian to monetarist and neoliberal paradigm for economic policy which occurred in the UK in the late 1970s and 1980s.

Table 1. Orders of institutional change.

Type of change	Renewed	Recast	Revolutionary
Policy ideas and instruments	Changed	Changed	Changed
Policy programmes and objectives	Same	Changed	Changed
Policy philosophical core	Same	Same	Changed

(Source: adapted from Schmidt, 2002, p. 223).

However, this kind of framing does not clearly differentiate between possible levels of abstraction – is the change being analysed occurring at the national government level, regional level or within individual policy areas, and how do these various dynamics of change interrelate? This paper therefore focuses on planning as a substantive national policy area that underwent adjustment in response to the political ideology of the Conservative Party of the time. The degree of change in planning (at least at the national institutional level) is here analysed in terms of adjustments to its individual policies (such as those represented by the NPPF) and to the broad programmatic objectives for planning (such as to give more planning powers to local neighbourhoods), within the context of the overarching political ideology of the Conservative Party of the time, and all within a broader framing of the neoliberalisation of British politics since the 1970s.

For changes in ideas and institutions to occur, the content of ideas must obviously be communicated. For Schmidt, ideas tend to be communicated via two types of discourse: coordinative discourse, which is that of those "at the center of policy construction who are involved in the creation, elaboration, and justification of policy and programmatic ideas", and 'communicative discourse', which "consists of the individuals and groups involved in the presentation, deliberation, and legitimation of political ideas to the general public" (Schmidt, 2008b, p. 310). Schmidt (2002) argues that the coherence of a government's communicative discourse is a factor in how persuasive it is and, therefore, its degree of public support (p. 235).

The remainder of the paper will examine the interaction of the various levels of ideas comprising the Conservative Party's early programme for planning reform in the years following the 2010 general election with a particular focus on the policymaking process that resulted in the 2012 NPPF. Political speeches, policy documents and parliamentary debates were analysed to identify the key conceptual elements of the political ideology of the Conservative Party of the time. A series of Conservative Party policy papers (Conservative Party, 2009a, 2009b, 2010) and associated speeches were examined to identify some of the programmatic ideas for planning, which were found by looking at how the problems were defined and what broad goals were presented. To examine how these then shaped the policymaking process surrounding the adoption of the NPPF 2012, 28 semi-structured interviews were carried out in 2015 with Conservative Party and Liberal Democrat politicians, policymakers, policy advisers, planning practitioners, think tanks, campaigners and professional groups. The interviews were transcribed and then coded and analysed using NVivo software to identify rationales for coordinative and communicative strategies and how these influenced the passage of ideas into national policy. The various versions of the NPPF were also analysed to identify shifts in policy wording.

Ideational Change: Moving through the Levels

The following account explores the dynamics of the relevant ideological and programmatic ideas that would help shape the Conservative-led coalition government's agenda for the introduction of the NPPF in England. The changes to English town and country planning introduced by the Conservative-led coalition government after 2010 should be seen in the longer-term historical context of the evolution of British politics over the previous thirty years.[3] Following the 'paradigm shift' (P. Hall, 1993) represented by the neoliberalisation of economic policy by the Conservative Party under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s, the centrist wing of the traditionally leftist Labour Party gained ascendancy in the mid-1990s partly thanks to a strategy of combining a self-espoused form of democratic socialism with liberalism (Blair, 1998). This enabled the party to occupy a neoliberalised centre ground by claiming that social democratic ends could be achieved

via a dynamic economy supported by an enabling state (rather than an overbearing redistributive state) while differentiating itself from the individualism of the Conservative Party and its apparent denial of communitarian ends (Heffernan, 2000). Following a general election victory in 1997, the rebranded New Labour in some respects continued with the broadly neoliberal agenda set by the previous Conservative governments (Hall, 2017a). For planning, this meant a continuing focus on facilitating economic prosperity (alongside social and environmental objectives), with a parallel critique of the planning system as being too slow and bureaucratic (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions [DTLR], 2001): "Without an effective planning system we risk constraining the economy, at a cost to everyone in the UK" (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [ODPM], 2002, n.p.).

However, this neoliberal impulse was tempered by linking it with an ostensibly social democratic conception of community whose collectivist connotations helped to contrast New Labour with a 'harsh and uncaring' Conservative Party (Bevir, 2000, p. 295). This deployment of the concept of community also brought a discursive emphasis on devolving power from the central state: "Government cannot achieve social inclusion for people, but it can help them achieve it for themselves, by transferring power and opportunity to local communities" (Labour Party, 2001, p. 24). This was linked with regional development to help more evenly distribute opportunity to "ensure that all regions share in the nation's wealth and prosperity" (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions [DTLR], 2002, p. 9) and was institutionalised in the planning system through the introduction of statutory regional plans via 2004 legislation. These plans would be prepared by regional planning bodies and were intended to "reflect regional diversity and specific regional needs" and would be "integrated with other regional strategies" (ODPM, 2002, n.p.) such as the economic strategies prepared by Regional Development Agencies which had previously been introduced by New Labour. However, despite their discursive connection with devolving power, these statutory regional plans did constitute a degree of central state oversight and were criticised by some in the Conservative Party as being a statist imposition on local areas (HC Deb, 2002 col 740). The perceived 'imposition' via regional plans of housing targets on local authorities was particularly unpopular (Conservative Party, 2009a, 2010). New Labour's regional plans were thus framed by its ideological opponents as a product of an overbearing central state.

The Conservative Party remained in opposition until the 2010 general election when, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, it formed a coalition government with the more traditionally centrist Liberal Democrats. The new Prime Minister David Cameron had, over the preceding four and a half years, ideologically repositioned the Conservative Party so that it could challenge New Labour by presenting a form of ostensibly 'compassionate conservatism' (Dorey, 2007). It was hoped that by (re)acknowledging the importance of society in conservative thought, the Conservative Party could present itself as being more socially aware than in the past. It was thought that this would also address the fears of those who felt that the institutions and local identities traditionally valued by conservatives were threatened by the neoliberalisation of conservative ideals over the preceding decades (Blond, 2009, 2010; Gray, 1997). The resultant ideological project sought to constrain the destabilising dynamism theoretically posed by neoliberalised economic agents "floating freely, untrammelled by ties, culture or history" (Willetts, 1997, p. 82) by situating the individual within a community network bound by shared institutions: "For a Conservative just to celebrate the freedom of the individual would be missing something equally important. There is not just 'me'; there is also 'we'" (Willetts, 2005). However, unlike New Labour's strategic central state oversight in support of community development and equality of opportunity (despite framing this in terms of devolving power), the Cameronite ideological project was suspicious of what its proponents saw as

state intrusion into local communities and identities. The Cameronite project was therefore ostensibly focused on creating the 'freedom' perceived as necessary for local communities (or 'neighbourhoods' in the new ideological framing) to take responsibility for their own development by reducing the size of the state so as to apparently reduce 'top down' and 'undemocratic' imposition of state power: "We are the only party believing that if you give people freedom and responsibility, they will grow stronger and society will grow stronger" (Cameron, 2005).

The preceding summary has briefly explored how the ideology of Cameronite conservatism sought to combat New Labour's prior electoral success by maintaining a Thatcherite focus on liberty, but anchoring it to a conservative conception of community (reframed via the concept of the neighbourhood) and ostensibly rejecting New Labour's concept of the active state. New Labour had itself been a political and ideological project designed to occupy neoliberalised Conservative Party electoral and ideational territory by articulating a positive conception of liberty and the transformative power of the economy, but connecting them with ostensibly social democratic concepts (such as community and an active state). In this way, both party ideologies acknowledged their differing traditions while responding to the challenge they presented to each other within a broadly neoliberal political culture to result in different, yet neoliberalised, political and ideological formations. The differing conceptual articulations of, and contradictions within, these party ideological projects had very different implications for planning.

The institution of planning was indeed a key target for reshaping by Conservative Party ideology, given its connection with deeply political questions concerning the relationship between private property rights and the state. This manifested in a number of programmatic ideas for planning that defined the problems to be solved and the associated normative goals. These were set out in a series of policy papers (Conservative Party, 2009a, 2009b, 2010). The key ideas for the topic of this paper were to simplify the planning system and make it more efficient, to promote growth through the planning system, to give more planning powers to communities and neighbourhoods and to abolish regional planning. These programmatic ideas were shaped by the broader Cameronite ideological amalgam, with its emphasis on personal liberty tempered by neighbourhood community identity and the rejection of too much 'top down' state 'interference' in property and development markets.

However, while the Conservative Party had spent some considerable effort developing an ideological project that would reshape planning, the same cannot be said of its eventual coalition partners the Liberal Democrats. There were no Liberal Democrat equivalents to the Conservative Party policy papers. However, the Liberal Democrats' manifesto did exhibit a degree of overlap with the Conservative Party in terms of the relationship between central government and local communities, particularly through an apparently mutual focus on abolishing regional tiers of planning governance and introducing greater localism. The foreword to the Coalition agreement between the two parties duly stated: "As our parties have worked together it has become increasingly clear to us that, although there are differences, there is also common ground" (HM Government, 2010, p. 7). The lack of preparation of detailed policy ideas for planning on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and the degree to which there was general alignment between the two parties concerning the programmatic idea to empower local communities, combined with the fact that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and all the planning ministers were Conservative during the coalition government, helps to explain the degree to which the Conservative Party was able to set the policy agenda for planning reform once in power.

Despite being presented by the Conservative Party as a coherent programme of reform for planning, some of its ideas were in conflict (Tait & Inch, 2016). This is evident in the interaction

between the neoliberal imperative to develop more housing for home ownership[4] which was to be framed as being particularly pressing in the aftermath of the global financial crisis (HM Government, 2011), and the localist imperative for decentralisation and giving more power to local neighbourhoods who may not actually wish to see more housing development in their areas. The NPPF became a key area of contestation as the Conservative-led government struggled to reconcile these tensions in its own ideological framework with regards to planning.

Having set the context at the ideological and programmatic level of ideas of the coalition period of English politics, the following section 'tells the story' of the process of drafting and publication of the 2012 NPPF,[5] which would be a carrier for various policies intended to help deliver a contradictory programme for planning. By prompting us to pay attention to the discursive interactions of the policymaking process, a discursive institutionalist approach encourages us to be aware of the influence of discursive strategy and the strategic *deployment* of ideas in influencing institutional change as much as the *content* of ideas themselves.

The NPPF Policymaking Process

Upon negotiating the formation of a coalition government with the Liberal Democrats in the immediate aftermath of the general election in May 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron appointed his ministers. These included Greg Clark as Minister for Decentralisation and Planning at the Department for Communities and Local Government ('DCLG') and George Osborne as Chancellor of the Exchequer based at HM Treasury ('the Treasury'). Osborne was focused on ensuring that the country would be able to develop its way out of the slump of the aftermath of the global financial crisis by freeing up private enterprise and reducing public spending. For the Treasury, a key role of planning was to facilitate this. The Treasury's *Plan for Growth* at the time therefore stated: "To make it easier … to get planning consent, the Government is introducing a powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development so that the default answer to development is 'yes'" (HM Treasury and Department for Business, Innovation and Skills [BIS], 2011, p. 18).

Drafting national planning policy would usually be the responsibility of civil servants based at DCLG. However, in October 2010, Clark invited four individuals from outside government to come together to form a Practitioners Advisory Group ('PAG') whose responsibility it would be to produce an initial draft ('PAG draft') which would then be used by government to inform its official draft NPPF (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2011a). The PAG included a Conservative local politician, a planning consultant, a senior executive at a volume housebuilder and a representative from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds ('RSPB'). By appointing the PAG, Clark was seeking to circumvent the institutionalised thinking of DCLG civil servants and to create a document that would not be overly constrained by ideational legacies from the New Labour era, could disrupt the path dependence of old ideas relating to planning and create a space through which new ideas could be more easily embedded in the institution (Policy Advisor A, personal communication, 2 October 2015; Policy Advisor D, personal communication, 13 October 2015).

However, the preparation of the PAG draft was not conducted in complete isolation from civil servants – civil service secretarial support was provided to the group via whom suggestions could be made regarding drafting, and PAG draft text was shared with civil servants for comment. Nevertheless, by giving primary responsibility for the initial drafting to the PAG, Clark had departed from usual practice and this resulted in a radically shorter document than a rough draft of approximately 200 pages that had been prepared by civil servants in response to the content of the Conservative policy papers in preparation for a possible Conservative government

(Slade, 2018). The PAG submitted its draft to the government in May 2011. Key elements included the introduction of a "presumption in favour of sustainable development", the requirement that "local plans should be prepared on the basis that objectively assessed needs are met" and an emphasis on "promoting positive strategies for environmental enhancement" (Practitioners Advisory Group [PAG], 2011).

The government published its official draft NPPF in July 2011 (DCLG, 2011a) after a coordinative 'write round' process whereby other government departments could seek to make changes. The resulting draft was 58 pages long and "looked remarkably like the PAG version" (Rutter, 2012, p. 13). However, there was a stronger emphasis on economic growth and the insertion of the phrase "decision takers at every level should assume that the default answer to development proposals is 'yes'" (DCLG, 2011a, p. 5). This language echoed the passage in the Treasury's *Plan for Growth* quoted above and was indeed a result of Treasury influence with that department "wanting to make sure that [DCLG was] taking this opportunity as much as possible" and pushing the document in a more "radical and more pro-growth" direction (Policy Advisor A, personal communication, 2 October 2015). The draft NPPF went out for public consultation on 25 July until 17 October 2011. DCLG received over 16,000 responses to the consultation as well as over 328,000 signatures in support of various petitions concerning the proposals (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2012). The large number of responses in part reflects the public controversy which ensued in the communicative sphere and the government's failure to include potential opposition groups effectively in the initial coordinative discursive process which produced the draft.

Very quickly after the publication of the draft NPPF, the government was subjected to an organised campaign by the conservation, countryside and environmental protection lobby. This comprised an alliance of interests including the National Trust (a conservation and national heritage organisation), the RSPB and the Campaign to Protect Rural England ('CPRE'). These groups were given platforms in the media, most notably by the usually Conservative-supporting *Telegraph* newspaper, which launched a prominent campaign called 'Hands Off Our Land'. This alliance largely reflected 'middle England' and was keen to project a middle-class construction of the countryside and the threats posed to it by new development. It was, therefore, a national expression of a rural preservationist discourse that has also been shown to play out through local plan-making processes (see Abram et al., 1996).

Key concerns of these groups included the perceived 'inadequate and unclear' definition of sustainable development, that the presumption in favour of sustainable development was skewed towards economic growth at the expense of social and environmental objectives, and that there was insufficient protection for the countryside and the environment (Campaign to Protect Rural England [CPRE], 2011; National Trust, 2011; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds [RSPB], 2011). There was much debate about what impact the presumption would have as worded in the government's draft NPPF. Whereas elements of the countryside and environmental protection lobby sought to portray the presumption as creating a new and unwelcome emphasis on development and growth, those in support of the reforms sought to demonstrate that such a presumption was not new. The government issued a planning 'mythbuster' document that stated: "From the birth of modern [English] planning in 1947 there was a presumption in favour of development" (Department for Communities and Local Government [DCLG], 2011b, p. 1). Conversely, the National Trust invoked the countryside protectionist aspect of the early English planning movement to legitimise its argument that: "The planning system itself has never been mandated to promote growth" (House of Commons, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2011, Ev 110).

The National Trust and CPRE's tactic of framing its discourse in terms that suggested the draft NPPF amounted to an attack on the countryside was highly successful in winning popular support. It

played to a perennial and deeply culturally embedded anxiety about the relationship between town and country (Stevenson, 2005; Williams, 1993), particularly in Conservative rural shires. The conservationist lobby was therefore skilful in articulating the debate in terms to which its (and many of the Conservative Party's) supporters would respond. Conversely, the government's discursive reliance on the need for growth in a post-financial crisis world, and on arguments regarding whether there had in fact always been a presumption in favour of development in the planning system, was far less successful in capturing the public's imagination. These did not have the same ideological, discursive and political power as the arguments deployed by the objectors.

By failing to include potential objectors effectively in the coordinative discourse shaping the initial draft policy, the government worsened an already potentially volatile situation. The government had not incorporated them sufficiently as participants in the coordinative sphere in a way that could have helped to neutralise some of the controversies that occurred in public once the draft NPPF was published. This failure came close to undermining a key part of the government's ideological project for planning, and demonstrates the importance of discursive strategy in the policymaking process. While the ensuing debate was conducted through public channels through communicative (and sometimes adversarial) discourse (Kirkup, 2011; Sparrow, 2011), it seemed as though a settlement might never be reached. The government was very much on the back foot as it was facing well-organised opponents who could deploy far more effective and emotive ideas that were deeply connected to middle class constructions of the countryside.

Such was the extent of the political problem for the government posed by the public controversy that the Prime Minister had to get directly involved. Cameron wrote a letter to the National Trust that was published in the *Telegraph* newspaper on 20 September 2011. In it, Cameron recognised the "need for a balance" between the "environmental and social dimensions as well as an economic dimension" of sustainable development (Winnett, 2011). This letter from Cameron marked a turning point. There was a further series of meetings between the government and its opponents in which the wording of the NPPF was discussed with a view to arriving at a compromise.

The final NPPF was published in March 2012 at the same time as the government's response to a report into the draft NPPF that had been prepared by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee. The government accepted 30 out of 35 of the committee's recommendations either in part or in full. Key changes the campaign had secured to the final NPPF included the removal of the reference to 'the default answer to development proposals should be 'yes", adjustments to the discussion of sustainable development to include reference to the United Nations General Assembly definition of sustainable development, and an allowance for transitional arrangements to give local authorities time to update their local plans before the presumption in favour of sustainable development would be given full weight in decision-making (Hope, 2012b). The final NPPF was publicly greeted by the National Trust and the coalition of interests of which it was a part as evidence that they had been listened to and that their campaign had been successful (Hope, 2012a).

The political pressure brought to bear on the government did result in changes to the NPPF to make it ostensibly more 'balanced'. However, the 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' remained. When interpreted in conjunction with the requirement in the NPPF for local authorities to plan for objectively assessed housing need and ensure that there is a five year supply of deliverable housing land in their areas, this could tilt the balance in favour of development on marginal sites and would subsequently result in many planning decisions to grant permission for new housing in contravention of the adopted local plan and the desires of the local planning authority and local community, often at appeal[6] and often on greenfield land (Smith, 2017).[7] In light of this, it is difficult to determine to what extent the public campaign actually succeeded in curbing

what was perceived by some to be an excessive emphasis on growth at the expense of other dimensions of sustainable development and localism in the draft NPPF. However, it is clear that the neoliberal current of the Conservative Party's ideology, and the associated programmatic emphases on deregulation and development, were firmly (re)institutionalised through the NPPF and succeeded in helping to push through new housing development in the face of local opposition in the years immediately following the adoption of the 2012 NPPF.

The NPPF and Institutional Change

The previous analysis has explored how the various levels of ideas relevant to planning in the early years of the coalition government interacted to help shape a programme of planning reform of which the NPPF was one key output. The paper has situated this period within the longer-term context of the neoliberalisation of British politics which has gone through successive waves since the 1970s. It has briefly shown how some of the conceptual elements of the neoliberalised political ideology of the coalition period Conservative Party were articulated in relation to planning, and how this was in some ways a continuation of elements of the previous New Labour political ideology (a focus on planning as facilitating growth and development) and in other ways a break from it (a reframing of the role of the state alongside a distinctly conservative conception of community – or 'neighbourhood' – that entailed a rejection of compulsory regional planning). Therefore, at the party-political ideological level there was continuity (connected to a broadly shared neoliberal orientation) as well as some significant shifts in the conceptual framing, which had implications for the institutional design of English planning.

There was not a clean deterministic relationship between political ideology, programme, and the policies that found their way into the NPPF. The NPPF policymaking process was characterised by ideological struggle as the government sought to legitimise its contradictory programme in the face of opposition. However, despite the spectacle of the public debate, concessions were secured that did not, in the end, prevent large amounts of un-planned housing on greenfield land being permitted. The NPPF was not fundamentally transformed or abandoned because of the consultation and ensuing debate. A key reason for this was that, although apparently highly adversarial at times, the terms of the dominant public oppositional discourse were very far from radical. The government's opponents were mainly 'small-c' conservative voices calling for an adjustment to the draft NPPF in the interest of environmental and landscape protection (and, perhaps, protection of house prices). There was no serious challenge to the fundamental political assumptions that shaped the document. The controversy was therefore more a symptom of the internal tensions in the ideology of the Conservative Party at the time – and the ideological flexibility of planning itself (Foley, 1960) – combined with the discursive strategies of the government that did not effectively manage these tensions. Such tensions have not gone away and the NPPF has been revised three times in the intervening period (once in 2018 and twice in 2019), with further proposed changes being consulted on at the time of writing. However, these further revisions have not generated much attention outside specialist circles, perhaps because they represented an adjustment to existing policy settings rather than the apparently more significant change the original NPPF represented.

In any case, the 2012 NPPF policymaking process is a good example of how ideas alone are not enough to explain institutional change – the design of the policymaking process, the nature of and relations between the ideas, and how they are communicated and by whom are, of course, significant factors also. By exploring this process, this paper has examined the messy realities that can characterise the institutionalisation of planning reform to add further detail to existing analyses

that examine the abstract relationship between ideas and institutional change in planning. A further level of complexity that is not examined here is at the level of implementation – local planners do have a degree of autonomy that can further challenge and exploit ambiguities in ideologically-informed national or regional programmes (Clifford, 2020).

So how much did the institution of planning change in this early coalition government period? When using a discursive institutionalist framework, it all depends on which level of ideas change occurs and to what degree. The case was made above for differentiating between a 'background' ideational context such as neoliberalism and the particular political ideologies of political parties within a broader neoliberalised context. In this way of seeing things, although the particular political ideology of the Conservative Party was distinct from that of New Labour as it related to planning, it did not usher in a 'paradigm shift'. There were broad continuities that were connected to a shared neoliberalised orientation, such as the ongoing focus on adjusting the institutional design of planning so that it can facilitate growth alongside a disciplining of planning and planners.

However, there were sufficient differences in the political ideology of the Conservative Party compared with New Labour to legitimise change through the 'recasting' of policy instruments, accompanied by adjustments to the programmatic objectives. The abolition of statutory regional planning (outside of London) and the introduction of non-compulsory neighbourhood planning, alongside the moves instituted via the NPPF, were all programmatic adjustments. However, these were not accompanied by a revolutionary shift in framing as to what planning is for and what it is supposed to achieve – it continued to be presented as being able to achieve multiple objectives but with a key focus on housing delivery with its perceived failings being used to legitimise further reform.

The growth-focused reforms therefore partly represented the continuation of what cultural theorist Stuart Hall called the 'hegemonic project' of neoliberalism. However, this is not to suggest that any such project can be complete. Following Gramsci (1971), Hall argued that hegemony is "a process, not a state of being" and "has constantly to be 'worked on', maintained, renewed, revised" (Hall, 2017b, p. 334). Ideology has a key role to play in this process – it acts to close down debate, to obfuscate contradictions and to exert interpretive control over understandings of what problems need to be addressed and how to address them. It can thus help to maintain, renew and revise a dominant hegemonic project when challenged, but can also organise opposition to it. As the NPPF policymaking process demonstrates, planning was a key site for ideological contestation where potential challenges to the Conservative Party ideology, and the contingent hegemonic project it helped renew, played out. However, because the politics and ideological articulations of the most powerful challenges were far from radical, and the range of acceptable ideas was policed by the ideological framework of the Conservative-led coalition government, opposition was at that time contained within acceptable limits.

However, there have been signs over the last decade that the hegemonic project of neoliberalism is faltering in parts of the global North, fracturing under the pressure of political, economic, environmental and social crises. These have been marked by a destabilising questioning of masses of people of the 'reigning common sense' as manifested in the rise of populisms across the political spectrum (Fraser, 2019). According to some (Rugitsky, 2020; Stahl, 2019), this period of crises corresponds to what Gramsci (1971) called an 'interregnum' in which "the old is dying and the new cannot be born" and during which "a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (p. 276). These crises have now been compounded by the global impact of the emergence of novel form of coronavirus in winter 2019 which brought morbid symptoms of its own. As we now move into a post-covid-19 political economy, whereby the relations between the state, the economy and

individual liberty are being further rearticulated, it remains to be seen in what form (if any) the neoliberal project will continue across spaces and scales and what roles planning will play in relation to the political ideologies of those struggling to secure a new political, social and economic order.

Conclusion

This paper has used a discursive institutionalist framework, combined with a morphological understanding of political ideology, to trace the process of the institutionalisation of the 2012 NPPF in England, and through it the role of discourse in influencing and shaping this element of the coalition planning policy reforms. By doing so, the paper makes three contributions that are of broader relevance beyond the confines of this case study and the English context. Firstly, by drawing a sharper distinction than is typical in the institutionalist literature between the 'background' level of ideas (such as more or less hegemonic forms of neoliberalism) and the conceptual morphologies of the ideologies of particular political parties, the analysis explores how differing ideological traditions can meld with neoliberal impulses in different ways to produce differing institutional articulations of neoliberalised planning reform. This framework therefore offers a way to think through the degree of continuity and change in different periods of planning reform and how these relate to the faltering hegemonic status of neoliberalism, the particular ideological traditions of political parties and how these meld to influence the framing of the problems that need to be addressed in planning. This approach has the potential to be used in analyses of the history of planning reform in different political cultures and could be profitably deployed in comparative studies to explore the relationship between variegated forms of neoliberalised planning and the political ideological contexts in different countries.

Secondly, while the paper explores how the programmatic and policy ideas comprising a period of planning reform are related to the political ideology of the political party or parties promoting the reform agenda, by focusing on the discursive interactions comprising the policymaking process, the paper explores how ideology does not unproblematically legitimise such reform. It is important to pay attention to the structure and nature of the associated coordinative and communicative discourse to trace how various ideological elements find their way into policy in what can be a difficult process. This is a key contribution of the deployment of a discursive institutionalist framework – the acknowledgement that ideas matter and that ideological and programmatic arrangements can have a strong influence on policy, but that the way in which such ideas are communicated and to whom is also of fundamental importance and can mean the difference between success and failure in the adoption of a policy programme.

Thirdly, by paying attention to the discursive interactions in the policymaking process and how these relate to the morphology of the political ideology of the party or parties promoting planning reform, the analysis explores the many roles ideology can play in this process. The paper has shown how ideology can seek to legitimise reform even in the face of obvious contradiction, 'suture together' such contradiction, close down debate when an ideological project is being challenged, and exert interpretive control over the terms in which the debate is being conducted. However, crucially, it has also been shown that ideology cuts both ways – it can serve to organise resistance to, as well as support for, a dominant political project.

These contributions have implications for international planning practitioners who are working in the context of neoliberalised planning. Firstly, the analytical framework deployed in this paper can be used by practitioners to think through the ideological and political dimensions of planning reform to better understand how deeply political and contestable ideas act to fix the terms by which

planning is understood and to what ends it is practiced. Secondly, and related to the first point, the account presented in this paper should remind practitioners that the neoliberalisation of planning is not inevitable or unending – these seemingly dominant ideas are deeply contestable after all. In the context of the crises we collectively face, there is potential for ideological and communicative work to be done by those who would like to see a positive vision of planning take its place as part of a new political paradigm. Although often deeply compromised, planning still has the potential to be a site of progressive change that can work with and reshape the market rather than be framed somehow in opposition to it. However, for this to be achieved, it would need to be actively promoted via a clearly articulated set of values and a corresponding vision for the positive role planning can play as part of a wider strategy of transforming the hegemonic political project of neoliberalism.

Notes

1. Others have used the terms constructivist institutionalism and ideational institutionalism (Hay, 2011; Moon, 2013). However, for the purposes of this paper, I will use the term discursive institutionalism to refer to all such forms of institutionalist analysis that share a focus on the "affective role of ideas" in constituting institutions and influencing change (Moon, 2013, p. 112).
2. Although, as pointed out by Hay (2011), interests are themselves revealed through ideas.
3. This section comprises a brief summary of more thorough accounts provided in Shepherd (2018, 2020).
4. This is not to argue that a focus on growth through housebuilding is intrinsically 'neoliberal' – after all, as pointed out by a reviewer for this paper, growth through development also meshes with a broadly Keynesian economic paradigm. However, the emphasis on growth through the development of new housing primarily via private enterprise (rather than directly by the state) with a focus on home ownership (rather than to meet a broader range of housing needs via social housing) alongside the critique of planning as being slow, bureaucratic and getting in the way of an efficient market made the growth focused discourse of the time neoliberal in character.
5. See also Slade (2018) for an excellent and detailed account of the 2012 NPPF policymaking process.
6. In England, planning appeals against local refusals of planning permission are decided by the Planning Inspectorate, an executive agency sponsored by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (formerly DCLG) and the Welsh Government.
7. There is evidence that the success rate of such adversarial strategies has declined in recent years due to planning inspectors according more weight to the landscape impacts of new greenfield housing development at appeal (Dewar, 2020).

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