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## Participatory, technocratic and neoliberal planning: an untenable planning governance *ménage à trois*

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### ABSTRACT

This article explores the tensions between the practices of professional planners, the participatory planning frameworks of governments and the neoliberalisation of planning governance in Australia. Rather than fitting neatly together, there are fundamental theoretical and practical tensions between participatory, technocratic and neoliberal planning frameworks. Each dictates a different source of power in terms of setting the planning agenda and making planning decisions. Using the New South Wales (NSW) planning system as a case study, we show that the introduction of 'the market' and 'local citizens' as possible planning agenda setters and decision-makers has proved difficult for the NSW Government to manage in practice. First, we separate the three planning governance processes and analyse each process as a discrete political philosophy. Second, we highlight where the political power is located to set the planning agenda and to make decisions within each of the three processes. Third, we show how each governance process enables and/or undermines the efficacy of the other governance processes. Fourth, we conclude that enabling a suite of power structures in one governance space can disable or undermine important power structures within the other governance processes.

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### 1. Introduction

Imagine a conversation between a strategic planner in a State Government planning department, the CEO of a large private sector infrastructure delivery company and a local resident of a neighbourhood undergoing considerable urban change. The strategic planner says she has a Master's Degree in urban planning and 10 years urban planning experience. She might argue that the State Government should have a central role in setting the planning agenda and making planning decisions. The private sector CEO says she has an MBA and 10 years infrastructure delivery experience. She might argue that the private sector should have a central role in setting the planning agenda and making planning decisions. The local resident says she has lived in the neighbourhood for over 10 years, witnessing significant urban change. She talks about the long-term attachments to her area and might argue that local residents should have a central role in setting the planning agenda and making planning decisions. To be sure, we could add many more actors to this imagined conversation – the chair of a local resident action group, a judge in the Land and Environment Court and so on. Local residents, professional planners and the private sector are significant because the involvement of citizens and the use of public-private amalgams for the provision of major infrastructure and social services are increasingly common features of planning systems across Australia (Aulich 2009; McGuirk 2005).

Politicians and professional planners extoll the benefits of both participatory and neoliberal governance in planning, and these discourses have been translated into planning documents and tools that reference the importance of including both local citizens and the private sector in decisions about urban development (NSW Government 2010, 2011, 2013). But what impact these tools will ultimately have in the context of a representative system of government remains unclear.

This article analyses three ways of thinking about how democracy might be enacted through the planning of cities: namely, representative/technocratic; participatory; and neoliberal planning. Within debates about complex and hybrid planning systems, the planning agenda setting and decision-making mechanisms within these three governance processes are often conflated across a range of theoretical domains (e.g. temporal, spatial, philosophical). They are rarely separated and analysed as three discrete political philosophies, each with its own way of mobilising planning power and resistance. Such an analysis requires a degree of conceptual abstraction from the complex ways hybrid planning systems function in the empirical world. The analytical benefit is, however, that it shows how each of the three governance processes affects the efficacy of other governance processes. Before we can investigate the complex governance assemblages that make up contemporary planning systems – and they

are complex, as pointed out by McGuirk (2005) and Minnery (2007) – we need to ask several more preliminary (and fundamental) questions. Can participatory and neoliberal governance processes comfortably coexist? And can these two governance processes fit into the broader system of representative government, a system wherein decisions are made by elected officials – assisted by the technical expertise of planning professionals – on behalf of citizens? Closer examination of the theories underpinning each of these three governance processes reveals fundamental – perhaps irreconcilable – tensions amongst them. The technocratic work of government planners, local participatory planning and the use of the private sector under neoliberal regimes of urban governance – all referred to in recent formulations of New South Wales (NSW) Government planning (2005, 2010, 2011, 2013) – are underwritten by different theories of democratic governance. As a result, rather than fitting neatly together, each governance process dictates a different source of power<sup>1</sup> to set the agenda and to make decisions in the realm of planning. We argue that contrary to political discourse, it might not be possible to hold this hybrid planning governance *ménage à trois* together.

To date, limited attention has been directed to the ‘wicked problem’ of bringing all three – neoliberal, participatory and technocratic – planning processes together as a seemingly unified system of planning governance. As with other wicked problems in planning, there seems to be no single right answer. However, if planning research is to tackle this problem in a way that is relevant to planning practitioners, it needs to take a ‘step back’ and to highlight the fundamental governance obstructions that stand in the way of its resolution. Using Foucault’s (1980) notion of power and resistance, we draw on theories of technocratic/representative, direct/participatory and neoliberal/market-centric democracy to investigate the analytical borderlands where these three governance processes converge (Agamben 2011; Badiou 2005; Peck 2010; Swyngedouw 2005). Neoliberal, participatory and technocratic planning are highly contested ideas (Mouffe 2005; Peck 2010) and many debates exist in the literature concerning how direct citizen participation might work in a neoliberal planning system (see for instance, Bond 2010; Legacy 2015; McGuirk 2012; Mouffe 1999; Purcell 2009). Rather than engaging with these debates, we take a step back and analyse examples taken from the NSW planning system. These examples each align distinctly with one of the three governance models and illustrate, at least in terms of political theory, how enabling a suite of governance processes in one governance space might disable or undermine important features of the other governance processes.

Four sections structure the remainder of the article. Sections 2 through to 4 address each of the three planning governance regimes in turn. Each section starts

by conceptually setting out where the political power to set the planning agenda and to undertake decision-making is located within this governance process, and is followed with a short planning governance case study example from NSW. Section 5 discusses the intersections of these governance processes and concludes by arguing that more attention needs to be given to the theoretical underpinnings of these three planning processes, and their perhaps irreconcilably incongruities.

## 2. Technocratic planning: representative democracy

In a federal system of government, power is divided amongst elected representatives at different levels of government. In Australia, it is the state-level elected politicians who hold the constitutional authority to set the planning agenda and to make planning decisions on behalf of citizens (Gleeson 2006). Each State devolves some of that power to local councils. Within both State and Local Governments, the requirements of technocratic government mean that elected officials defer some of their agenda setting and decision-making power to planning professionals within their departments.

In the NSW context, the planning system operates within a representative system of democratic government, which relies heavily on the technocratic expertise of professional planners. Within this representative system of government, sovereignty is exercised within the framework of the rule of law by a small group of representatives who are elected by the citizens (Held 2006). Importantly, within this system of representative democracy, power and resistance over planning agenda setting and decision-making are constantly shifting, reflecting an increasingly politicised and unstable discussion about the scale (federal, state, local) at which planning governance should be undertaken. The politics of planning governance rescaling runs from the federal, through the states and territories, down to the local level. Arguably, the proposed referendum in 2013 on recognising Local Government in the Australian constitution represented one of the most significant attempts at rescaling planning governance under Australian Federalism (Gratten 2013; Ruming et al. 2015). However, rescaling also occurs within the existing constitutional framework as Federal, State and Territory, and Local Governments constantly vie for a share of planning governance power.

Over the last decade in NSW, there has been a constant push and pull between the State and Local Governments regarding decision-making over large development proposals. In the realm of development assessment, the State Government has devolved much of the decision-making power to Local Government. Nonetheless, the elected politicians at the state level

can, and indeed do, recall this power from time to time. Currently, the NSW Government can override local planning decisions for development and infrastructure deemed to be of state significance according to the power laid out in the *State Environmental Planning Policy (State and Regional Development) 2011* regulation. Prior to 2011, Part 3A of this state policy – introduced as part of a suite of reforms in 2005 – also gave the State the power to ‘call in’ certain developments (NSW Department of Planning 2005), but with a much broader scope for Ministerial discretion. Indeed, in the 2011 NSW state election the major political parties politicised planning governance, with the centre-right Liberal Government coming to power on an electoral platform built around handing planning governance power back to Local Governments authorities and, surprisingly, a claim that they would even hand some power over to local citizens (NSW Government 2011). One of the first acts of the Liberal Government was to abolish Part 3A. But then in the 2013 White Paper, *A New Planning System for NSW*, the NSW State Government sought to claw back their governance power from Local Government authorities with a significant restructuring of the planning system (NSW Government 2013).

In addition to the State/Local Government rescaling, a form of ‘new regionalism’ (Paasi 2003), which is characteristic of the NSW (and other) Government’s emphasis on intervention in urban policy at the scale of metropolitan regions rather than local divisions, is driving a reworking of the political level at which citizens, businesses and community organisations are governed. In *A Plan for Growing Sydney* – the most recent iteration of State planning for metropolitan Sydney released in 2014 – the State Government has divided all local councils in Sydney into one of six subregions. Intention for these subregions will ‘... build on the actions set out in *A Plan for Growing Sydney*. Councils, the community and the Greater Sydney Commission and the NSW Government will work together to finalize and implement these plans’ (NSW Government 2014a, 106). The proposed Greater Sydney Commission is an entirely new planning governance actor in Metropolitan Sydney. While details about the makeup, role and functions of the Commission are unclear at this point, the State Government has stated that the Commission will be ‘independent’ (NSW Government 2014b), prompting optimism from some that a metropolitan planning authority with powers over the six subregions will negate the need for Council amalgamations currently being investigated by the State Government. According to Johnson (2015), ‘the trade-off for councils not to have major change should be to accept a stronger role for the Greater Sydney Commission to drive the big picture issues’. What is important for us here is how the Greater Sydney Commission might re-articulate constitute planning

governance power in Metropolitan Sydney, and particularly how it might ‘work together’ with local councils and the community in the coming years.

In recent decades the Federal Government has been playing an increasing role in urban planning in Australia, further complicating the planning governance landscape in Australia. While in practical planning and political terms, the constitutional power to plan Australian cities resides with the States and Territories and through them the Local Government authorities, in December 2010, the Australian Federal Government released the *Our Cities Our Future—Building a Productive, Sustainable and Liveable Future* discussion paper. This was quickly followed with a policy framework for implementing a National Urban Planning Framework ‘in partnership with State, Territory and Local Governments, business and the community’ (Australian Government 2011, 2). The policy framework set out the Federal Government’s ambitions for a national approach to the planning and governance of Australian cities (Australian Government 2011). While the policy was subsequently scrapped by the newly elected Liberal Government in 2013, the National Urban Policy Framework remains significant as the first attempt by the Federal Government to coordinate the State and Territories’ urban agendas and reinterpret the constitutional demarcations of governance power under Australian Federalism (Glesson 2006; Ruming et al. 2015). Whether future Federal Governments will make similar attempts remains to be seen. In the meantime, the Federal Government continues to exert its considerable influence over State and Local planning through funding ‘big-ticket transport infrastructure projects’ (Legacy and Minicucci 2014). Indeed, the intra-governmental politics amongst Federal, State and Local Governments about the rescaling of planning governance within Australia’s representative democracy will continue to be played out in the coming years. However, the technocratic system of representative democracy that structures this politics – a foundational feature of the democratic government system that NSW planning governance processes sit within – is likely to remain intact. This raises a key question: where does direct community participation ‘sit’ within a representative democracy?

### 3. Participatory planning: direct democracy

In direct democracies, sovereignty resides with an assembly of ordinary local citizens instead of a collective of elected representatives and their technocrats (Farrar 2007). Citizens in more direct forms of democracy – often through governance tools such as citizen juries and referenda – set the agenda and hold decision-making power, while the elected representatives and technocrats have a limited, if any, role to play. Rogers (2013, 6) argues that ‘what is missing

from these [citizen] participation policies', such as those that are advocated for by professional organisations such as International Association of Public Participation (IAP2), 'is the way – the method or the process – through which these processes of local-level democracy will be incorporated into a system of representative democracy'.

Recent decades have seen a trend in the planning literature towards recommending a move away from so-called 'top-down' comprehensive planning toward strategic planning based on citizen participation. While some planning scholars are deploying theories of agonistic pluralism to critically revise conceptions of participatory planning (these are not explored here, but see, e.g. Allmendinger and Haughton 2012; Bond 2010; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Mouffe 1999), many of the citizen participation processes that are developed by government planners in NSW continue to be underwritten by theories of direct democracy and Habermasian principles of communicative action (Maginn 2007; Mouffe 2005; Purcell 2009; Rogers 2016). In these processes citizens are positioned to play a direct role in decision-making about public affairs (Held 2006). In the legal planning realm, an oft-ignored site where significant 'participation in planning' occurs, calls for public participation in planning gained strength in the 1970s. This prompted McAuslan (1980) to identify a burgeoning 'ideology of public participation', which sees the role of planning law as ensuring that the public has rights of participation in land use planning decisions, not because of any property interests, but in the interests of social democracy and justice. According to this political philosophy, in decisions about development, landowners should be no more important than anyone else. More recently in NSW, and following debates within planning theory and practice by scholars such as Healey (2007) and Albrechts (2006), there have been calls for planning to be based less on planners 'imposing' their technical expertise on the public and more on planners engaging in a dialogue with local residents on an on-going basis in order to formulate policies based on a consensus of what the community 'wants' for their local area. Aulich (2009) argues that the move towards more direct citizen participation in Local Government is aimed at addressing the shortcomings of representative democracy. In effect, by increasing local citizen input into policy-making, the government can respond to demands for participation from a better educated, more articulate and more demanding citizenry, many of whom express a declining level of trust in political institutions and a belief that purely representative democracy often results in a 'democratic deficit'. This belief is expressed in demands for supplementary engagement of citizens beyond the traditional democratic processes of three- or four-year elections, with calls for more meaningful

exchanges with government (Aulich 2009, 52). The overall argument is that planning policy formulation and implementation is much more effective when local residents are involved 'directly' with professional planners and departments at particular moments in time (NSW Government 2005, 2011, 2013), rather than being in ongoing agonistic relationships with planners (Bäcklund and Mäntysalo 2010; Rogers 2016).

While the argument for direct citizen involvement at particular moments has proved discursively and politically powerful for planning policy-makers in NSW, where it has been implemented in practice, local community uptake has been variegated (Atkinson and Cope 1997; Cornwall 2004; Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Rogers 2016). McAuslan (1980) pointed out that the ideology of public participation does not sit comfortably with the ideology of private property (which sees the role of law as protecting private property interests) and public interest (whereby elected officials and experts determine what is in the best interests of the community). As such, the tendency of the NSW Government is to 'pay lip service' to notions of public participation, while participation is often managed on terms that are dictated by government and, increasingly, in ways that are deemed acceptable to private property interests. Essentially, this form of participation is being stripped of any social democratic foundation:

Public participation cannot in other words be admitted on an equal basis to help shape the framework of law and administration because its ideology represents a threat not just to the existing forms of law and administration of planning but to what those existing forms are there to protect and enhance – private property relations. At best, therefore, public participation is brought into the existing system minus its ideology and on terms acceptable to, and interpreted by, public officials and judges. At which point, according to the ideologists of public participation, it ceases to be public participation. (McAuslan 1980, 145)

Indeed, a voluminous literature (Atkinson and Cope 1997; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2004; Legacy 2015) supports the claim that in practice public participation ends up being more of an information-sharing process between local councillors, government planners and local citizenries, a process through which councillors or planners might convince residents of the correctness of the planning decisions that they have already taken.

The research of McAuslan (1980), Meadowcroft (2001), Rogers (2016), March (2012) and others raises a fundamental concern about participatory governance that has not been sufficiently dealt with in the planning literature: that tensions arise when governments attempt to incorporate participatory planning processes into representative democracies. As Meadowcroft (2001) points out, the foundational notion of

representative democracy is that local representatives make decisions on behalf of local residents based on the representatives' perceptions of what is in the best interests of those residents. This might coincide with what those residents desire, but it might not. Ultimately the final decision will be based on what the councillors perceive, based on their own expertise and the advice of their planning experts, is in the 'public interest'. Meadowcroft (2001, 39) points out that where residents' desires and the perceived public interests are in conflict, representatives will end up 'acting as the trustee of their constituents' interests rather than as a delegate mandated to serve the numerical majority'. In practice, when a government calls for public participation, in the context of a representative system of democracy, the decision-making power ultimately resides with a suite of bureaucrats operating within one or more institutional sites, meaning that limited power, including the power to resist, resides with citizens in the state-directed participatory process.

Since 2005, there has been a sustained effort by the NSW State Government (2005, 2010, 2011, 2013) to reframe planning policy in terms of ideals around local democracy, social inclusion and citizen participation. Documents such as the NSW State Plan, the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy and, to a somewhat lesser extent, the more recent *Plan for Growing Sydney* call for the returning of 'planning powers to the community and giv[ing] people a say on decisions that affect them' (NSW Government 2011, 6). However, as an intersecting suite of governance processes, the suggestion that the government could defer some of the technocratic decision-making powers of their professional planners over to the local community is highly problematic. For example, the NSW State Plan states that 'essential to our strong democracy ... [is] enabling citizens to critique government services, and finding more ways to involve people in government decision making ... Making it easier for citizens to interact with government through modern, innovative and engaging tools' (NSW Government 2011, 55–58). As independent governance processes, *critiquing government services, involving citizens in decision-making and interacting with citizens via new media tools* are underwritten by different ideas about citizen participation. 'Critiquing' the government can be deployed as a form of resistance, by accessing government planning information through freedom of information (GIPA) legislation that does not necessarily require a fundamental restructuring of technocratic planning governance (i.e. the ministers and the planners act and then the citizens resist, review and critique). However, there are studies emerging of far more radical forms of agonistic citizen 'critique' of planning action (Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013; Rogers 2016). Equally, when governments 'interact' with citizens via new media tools, they do not necessarily defer some

of their decision-making power to citizens through this process. This might partly explain why there has been very limited uptake or community interest in online community consultations in NSW. In short, governments can implement both of these governance processes without undermining the technocratic power of their planning professionals – that is, without deferring their technocratic decision-making power to a local citizenry.

However, to truly 'involve citizens directly' in decision-making, in political philosophy terms, would require a fundamental restructuring of the representative system of government that currently frames planning governance in NSW. What is being rhetorically proposed represents a political challenge to the representative *system* of democratic government in Australia – one that would require that some of the technocratic power of planning professionals be deferred to non-government actors via non-technocratic and non-representative governance processes. The government's solution to this governance dilemma, where they have sought to acknowledge and address it, has been to use the language of direct democracy and the tools of communicative consensus-seeking action (see for instance, NSW Government 2011, 55–58). However, as McAuslan (1980, 145) identified, this is political discourse 'minus the ideology'. The more direct forms of democracy that the government is rhetorically proposing, such as citizen involvement in planning decision-making, would dilute the power that has been deferred to planning professionals within NSW planning departments because it would require the introduction of a new power structure to intersect with the planning agenda setting and decision-making processes of representative government.

As a local citizenry could never be assumed to hold the technocratic expertise of planners, the following questions must be asked: through what governance process should local citizens be granted planning agenda setting and decision-making power, if at all? And, if citizens are not granted this power, then in what sense are these participatory planning processes being called democratic? Further compounding the democratic oxymora at the intersection of direct and representative models of democracy within the NSW planning system is the introduction of yet another planning governance process, namely the neoliberalisation of planning governance in NSW.

#### 4. Neoliberal planning: market-centric democracy

Much has been written about neoliberal planning, but we will not rehearse those debates here (McGuirk 2005 and 2012; Peck 2010; Purcell 2009). What is important for us here is that within neoliberalising governance structures, elected politicians still hold the

constitutional authority to set the agenda and make decisions. However, the requirements of neoliberal governance suggest that planning professionals should defer some of their agenda setting and decision-making power to market forces and to the private sector actors through various contractual arrangements with private and non-government actors.

In the NSW context, the power to enable or restrain private sector power, and to incorporate neoliberal and technocratic governance processes, remains with elected politicians within the representative system of democracy. The responsibility to manage private sector insolvencies and other market failures, when the NSW Government enters a contractual agreement with a private sector actor, largely falls to the government's technocratic managers. The NSW Government (2011) regularly makes claims about being coerced by market forces and global capitalism, rising public debt and the need to offload their public infrastructure provision and management to the private sector. In contrast to these discursive claims, McGuirk (2005) and Rogers (2014) have demonstrated that the government is not a passive social actor in the neoliberalisation of planning governance in NSW, but rather a key player responsible for shaping and reshaping the urban, peri-urban and regional spaces of the state. Rather than an inevitable outcome of global economic uncertainty, the government's collective decisions to use the private sector as the provider and/or manager of state infrastructure and social service provision is an ideological choice that is reshaping planning governance processes in NSW (NSW Government 2011, 2013). It is a decision that disorders the technocratic power of planning professionals through further enabling private sector power structures and complicates their reported participatory planning objectives through the introduction of additional private sector actors, 'the market' and 'economic key performance indicators' in planning agenda setting and decision-making processes.

Through neoliberalising governance processes, the government's planning departments are encouraged to position financial evaluation, market conditions and economic performance as important planning drivers and decision-making mechanisms. These conditions make it harder for citizens to contribute to the policy debates about the reconfiguring of their cities, for they are rarely thought of as valid planning 'knowledge holders' about their cities (i.e. they are not technocratic planning experts), nor are many citizens financial share-holders in the state-sponsored private interests that are central to neoliberal planning. Neoliberal governance raises a fundamental concern about what types of planning governance processes are freedom-creating, and for which social strata or group (Peck 2010; Soja 2010). Through the selection of certain ideologically mediated market mechanisms

over others, such as public-private partnerships, the NSW planning system is changing the conditions by which local citizens and private sector actors might engage in the planning of their state.

Within neoliberal governance processes, sovereignty is increasingly exercised by a small group of very powerful and wealthy businesses and citizens (Hay 2013; Peck 2010). Like participatory planning, neoliberal governance represents an extra-representative government rescaling of political power in relation to the NSW planning system. The market-rights that are created *within* the governance processes facilitate a suite of new power structures that enable private sector businesses to act from *outside* of the government system. The result is a neoliberalising assemblage of planning governance that requires a restructuring of the relationships between the private sector and the government planners (Rogers 2016). Public-private partnerships are a good example of the planning mechanisms that are required within this type of planning governance hybridity. The democratic securities and protections that were previously regulating the pre-neoliberal public sector planning system (i.e. through representative and technocratic planning that was largely undertaken within government) must be reconfigured to make them more compatible with neoliberalising 'market-based' governance processes.

It is important to note that arguably the government and private actors have both contributed to urban infrastructure delivery for many millennia (Farrar 2007). What makes neoliberal governance different is that private sector actors are increasingly invited to be 'responsible' in economic and legal terms, for public infrastructure and social service delivery, but may not necessarily deliver the desired broader public benefits that are bounded up in delivering these projects. The private sector is not expected to be responsible for the 'public good', but rather, might achieve some 'public benefit' while chasing their financial returns. In other words, the responsibility for social democracy still resides with the government even though the goods and services are contracted out to the private sector. The large infrastructure projects that the private sector now manages have significant social and spatial justice imperatives that were previously considered the remit of, and perhaps only protectable by, governments. In fact, when public-private partnerships fail in NSW (Hawthorne 2013) the political discussion quickly turns toward the democratic implications for citizens, such as government bailouts that might be needed to ensure the 'public' infrastructure and/or services are still provided. In this respect, it is the elected representatives, and the planning technocrats to some degree, who remain responsible for strategic planning and large-scale infrastructure deliverables in NSW.

## 5. An untenable planning governance *ménage à trois*

Democratic systems of government are premised on a basic precondition that citizens have the freedom to question the power of their sovereign ruler (Farrar 2007). However, political philosophers have long debated which amalgamation of governance processes might best enable this basic democratic right to be realised by citizens (Agamben 2011; Badiou 2005). Planning systems are similarly dynamic amalgamations of various governance processes, which are not always brought together in obvious ways (Swyngedouw 2005). Nor are the governance relationships necessarily symbiotic or without an urban politic (Allmendinger and Haughton 2012; McGuirk 2005). A very clear urban politics is driving the assemblage of various governance processes in the NSW planning system (Rogers 2014, 2016). There is intra-governmental politics between different levels of government, which spans Federal, State and Local Governments. This is largely about the rescaling of planning governance within Australia's representative democracy, and largely does not undermine, although it does recalibrate, the technocratic power of planning professionals. It represents a rescaling of the government levels within which technocratic planning power is placed. Within this politics of planning governance the elected representatives (i.e. Ministers) and the planning professionals hold the constitutional authority to set the planning agenda and they hold the decision-making power. Of greater concern for us in this article is the extra-governmental politics among government, citizenries and businesses of participatory and neoliberal planning within the NSW planning system. The rhetorical introduction of 'the market' and 'citizens' as planning agenda setters and decision-makers seems duplicitous and has proved difficult to manage in practice. The duplicitousness draws attention to the way the state might violate the democratic principles that enable the technocratic power of planning professionals if they devolve some of their decision-making and agenda setting power to 'the market' or 'local citizens,' or indeed both.

Further research is needed in two key but inter-related areas, one theoretical and another empirical. At the theoretical level, fundamental tensions between technocratic, participatory and neoliberal governance processes need to be teased out. Fundamentally, each governance process dictates a different source of power in terms of setting the planning agenda and making planning decisions. In empirical terms, a better understanding of the practical planning relationships between top-down and bottom-up planning governance is needed. If involving the private sector and local citizenries in planning matters is going to remain a key objective of governments, more empirical work is

required to model these planning governance inter-relationships and tensions. This analysis indicates that rolling out a participatory planning or neoliberal governance process in one location can undermine important features of technocratic planning governance in another location, and *vice versa*.

As discussed above, the NSW Government has sought to manage 'local citizen participation' by recruiting the tools of direct democracy and locating these within temporally specific consensus-seeking consultation 'events'. Within these more direct forms of planning governance, the power to set the local planning agenda is suggested to reside, at least in part, with local citizens rather than with the elected representatives and their planning professionals. The government uses the rhetoric of social inclusion and citizen involvement in decision-making but does not explain the mechanisms through which these processes of local-level and more direct forms of governance will be incorporated into the representative system of government and technocratic planning processes. Thus a tension often emerges between the long-term strategic planning decisions of professional planners and the often more short-term and localised concerns of local communities.

We have not discussed the significant citizen involvement in planning that originates from outside of the planning system (Legacy 2015; Rogers 2016), and we are not arguing against the inclusion of citizens in local or state planning matters. We are arguing that it might not be possible to include citizens and businesses in planning governance processes in the ways that the NSW Government has proposed. The government is yet to develop an effective way for citizens and businesses to collectively work alongside the technocratic processes that guide the NSW planning system. Furthermore, the neoliberalising and consensus-seeking government-led participatory planning regimes that do exist could stifle other forms of ongoing agonistic political engagement in planning matters (Mouat, Legacy, and March 2013). Local citizenries have long used political tools that are complementary to technocratic planning – such as freedom of information, lobbying politicians, submitting planning objections, accessing the land and environment court or going to the media – and while these political tools are not always preferred by planners or developers, nor are they without their own politics and shortcomings, they do have some historical credibility (Rogers 2016). Extensive research suggests that the formal participatory planning processes of governments might in fact be placating, or at very least rendering less visible, these long-standing and effective citizen participation processes (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2004; Maginn 2007). Discourses of local consensus and collective decision-making have replaced local discontent and activism as the *modus operandi* for citizen

participation without any real process for handing planning governance power over to local citizens (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Cornwall 2004).

Compounding this planning governance dilemma, the government's decision to use the private sector and 'the market' to inform planning decisions to drive economic growth further disorders the technocratic power of planning professionals. Professional planners are now required to apply financial criteria to social and physical planning concerns, and economic performance has become a key decision-making mechanism. The enabling of neoliberal governance auditing, and the private sector power structures that this governance process qualifies, undermines both the participatory desires and the technocratic planning realities of government. The power of professional planners, as important planning agenda setters and decision-makers – and the aim for more 'local community' input for that matter – are diluted by the private sector contracts that lock-in planning decisions and rule out transparency (e.g. commercial-in-confidence of 30-year public-private partnership contracts). This, we argue, is the very dilemma the NSW Government finds itself in as it searches for an impossible *ménage à trois* of incompatible governance processes across difference scales of government. What is needed is a critical reappraisal of bringing participatory, technocratic and neoliberal planning together within the NSW (and other) planning system – a reappraisal that acknowledges how each governance system might enable or mitigate the efficacy of other governance processes.

### Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

### Note

1. Foucault (1980) argued that power and resistance are not positional, but rather relational and fluid. They are not resources that one party might hold over another, or the ability of a governance process to dominate or control another. For Foucault, there is always a dynamic relationship between power and resistance, which is conditional on the specific context within which they are mobilised. Thus, the power and resistance of different planning governance modalities can be analysed relationally, that is, in relation to other planning governance modalities.

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