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Dallas Rogers

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Monitory Democracy as Citizen-driven Participatory Planning:
The Urban Politics of Redwatch in Sydney

Dallas Rogers
School of Social Sciences and Psychology, Western Sydney University, Penrith, Australia

ABSTRACT
This article analyses a case of citizen-driven participation in urban planning in Sydney, Australia. Drawing on a case study of the local resident action group REDWatch the analysis is undertaken within the context of the hybrid forms of technocratic, participatory and neoliberal planning that are operating in the New South Wales planning system. Framed by the concept of monitory democracy, the analysis explores the four key features of monitory forms of civic action: (1) monitoring powerful social actors; (2) encouraging difference, disagreement, debate and change; (3) making formal power structures more transparent and accountable; and (4) fostering new forms of informal political power. The findings demonstrate that analyses of formal community consultation events and participatory planning policies are far too narrow to determine the civic utility of citizen participation in planning. Expanding the analytical borderland beyond the formal structures of the planning system exposes important informal citizen participation practices that are operating from outside of planning systems. Unlike formal state-driven participatory planning events and policies, these informal citizen-driven participatory planning practices can deal with planning hybridity and conflict, which are increasingly central to many contemporary planning systems.

INTRODUCTION
Over the past decade the status of technocratic planning governance in Australia has been called into question. In the state of New South Wales (NSW) the emancipatory promises of participatory planning and the claims about the market responsiveness of neoliberal planning have been grafted onto the...
technocratic planning process of the NSW state planning system (McGuirk, 2001, 2005). Much of the empirical focus on participatory planning (Maginn, 2007; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; McClymont, 2011), with some notable recent exceptions (Bond, 2011; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Taşan-Kok & Baeten, 2012; Mouat et al., 2013), has focused on formal state-driven participatory planning events and policies; and the consultative and participatory methods that are bound by the constraints of state planning systems. Rather than start with the formal consultative and participatory practices of governments, this article approaches the question of community participation in planning from the conceptual vantage point of “informality” (Roy, 2005; Porter et al., 2011). It analyses the intersection of the NSW state government’s formal planning process, the private sectors’ possible formal role in delivering the planning infrastructure, with the informal civic action of the resident action group REDWatch in the on-going planning process for four inner city suburbs in Sydney.

REDWatch is a local community organisation based in the Redfern/Waterloo area located 3 km south of the central business district of Sydney (see: Figure 1 and http://www.redwatch.org.au/). The organisation’s name is an acronym formed in part from the four Sydney suburbs the organisation has a political interest in—Redfern, Eveleigh, Darlington and Waterloo (colloquially known as the Redfern/Waterloo area). The organisation deliberately combined the acronym REDW with the word “watch” to signify their political intention to watch the government and private sectors’ actions in their area through an informal community-driven planning engagement strategy that sits outside of the

Figure 1. Redfern/Waterloo.
government’s formal participatory planning process. REDWatch initially emerged out of local community interest in the 2004 “Inquiry into Issues relating to Redfern & Waterloo” (Legislative Council – Standing Committee on Social Issues, 2004). The organisation has a three-tier membership structure comprising a Co-ordination Group, Membership Group and a Supporters List. Seven members form the Co-ordination Group undertake much of the day-to-day work of the organisation on a voluntary basis. There is also a more fluid group of around 30 paid-up members in the Membership Group. The Membership and Co-ordination Group members include local private homeowners, senior managers and employees of local non-government organisations, and several local public housing tenants. At the third semi-formal level, there are around 175 registered Supporters who are invited to REDWatch events and receive newsletters. The Supporters include local public, social and private renters, private homeowners and representatives from several non-government organisations (I will refer to the actors within the Membership, Co-ordination and Supporters Groups as “REDWatch members”). Individual members from several major political parties and local residents without formal and semi-formal membership also attend and contribute to REDWatch meetings. REDWatch’s form of civic action is not only operationalised by the organisation’s members’ and supporters’ activities. Their website, … offers a virtual resource centre for both residents and academics [and others, which] brings together information concerning the community from Government reports, the media and local email updates to provide a community information resource for those wanting to know what is happening in the area and why it is happening. We have added a lot of historical information so the community can be reminded of what we have been promised [by the government] at various points of time. (REDWatch, 2011)

In terms of Internet traffic, between October 2011 and September 2012, for example, the REDWatch website received around 1000 visits per day and more than 25 000 visits per month (see: Rogers & Darcy, 2014). This suggests that the website was an important virtual information resource for a range of people. The level of interest in the REDWatch website, while surprising, is understandable for the Redfern/Waterloo area is at centre of the territory marked out as “Global Sydney” by the NSW state planning department (NSW Government, 2013b; Rogers, 2014). The NSW state government holds large tracts of public housing and public land in Redfern/Waterloo. The Redfern/Waterloo area has long been synonymous with Indigenous and low-income housing in media and other public discourse, and the public housing buildings are a defining feature of the urban landscape. The traditional owners of Redfern are the Gadigal people, although the current Indigenous population is relatively mobile and moves through an area located just north of Redfern station – colloquially known as “The Block” – from many lands and communities across NSW and Australia. The Block has a unique history of Indigenous evictions from properties and racial discrimination. This history stretches back to the 1970s and includes the formation of the Aboriginal Housing Company and the ongoing contemporary politics of The Pemulwuy Project (Pitts, 2008), which I do not discuss in this article. The broader Redfern/Waterloo area has a relatively stable public housing population; 57% of public housing tenants have lived in Redfern/Waterloo for more than five years and 32% have lived there from more than 10 years. The area has a very low-income profile compared to other sections of the city, a predominantly older profile (53% of public housing tenants are aged over 60), with a significant number of single person households and people with disabilities. In Redfern, there are 1604 public housing properties (about 25% of all housing) and in Waterloo there are 2536 public housing properties (about 90% of all housing).

The Redfern/Waterloo area has been subject to various NSW state government statutory planning bodies including the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project, the Redfern Waterloo Authority, the Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority and more recently Urban Growth NSW. The NSW state government has been preparing extensive redevelopment plans for the area since the mid 2000s (NSW Government, 2013b). The area had its own NSW state government Minister from 2004 to 2011. Guided by the NSW state government’s (NSW Government, 2013b) strategic regional planning document, the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy (NSW Government, 2013b), Urban Growth NSW (2012) stated that local community participation would guide any redevelopment of the area. Private-sector developers
are expected to redevelop Redfern/Waterloo to release the “land value” through public-private partnership arrangements with the government (Urban Growth NSW, 2012).

REDWatch label their approach to community participation in planning matters at Redfern/Waterloo as a form of power “monitoring”. Their name and mission statement encapsulates their focus as a monitory civil society collective; they state, “REDWatch exists to monitor Government involvement in our area and to push for outcomes that benefit the community and not just the Government” (REDWatch, 2011, p. 1). Monitory forms of informal civic action (Keane, 2009, p. 713) require a reconsideration of the formal boundaries that are placed on citizen action in planning matters by governments (Roy, 2005; Porter et al., 2011). The political philosopher Keane (2009) argues that, “monitory democracy [is] an imperfect but durable form of extra-parliamentary [i.e. informal] representation, within a market economy otherwise ruled by corporate power, risk-taking, greed and the private making and taking of profits (p. 713). Applying Keane’s monitory theorisation of democratic/civic action to the REDWatch case allows for a radical reinterpretation of informal citizen action in planning matters. This approach calls into question the formal boundaries that have been placed on participatory planning practice, as well as the social actors that can create and authorise access to formal and informal participatory planning spaces. At the centre of Keane’s (2009) critique, as well as other scholars who have focused on the relationships between formality and informality in relation to civic action (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Roy, 2005; Porter et al., 2011), is a question about the types of civic participation spaces that different social actors can create or gain access to in order to exercise and/or challenge power.

Keane’s notion of “monitory democracy” is a slippery concept, which attempts to capture a very broad suite of changing civic/democratic actions within a landscape of increasing privatisation, globalising electronic communications technologies and the consolidation of political awareness about particular political issues at the global level (and the resultant expansion of local political concerns into global political actions by groups such as Human Rights Watch). Rather than follow Keane into the global sphere, in this article I draw out the key features of Keane’s notion of monitory democracy and apply them to informal citizen-driven participatory planning at the local-state political nexus. Monitory forms of civic action, as I use the concept in this article:

1. Focus on monitoring the formal actions of powerful social actors through an informal civic space (often this monitoring is undertaken by less powerful social actors).
2. Reject consensus-seeking models of civic action and encourage difference, disagreement, debate and change (they accept there will be multiple interested parties who will disagree).
3. Lead to greater transparency and accountability in the formal and informal, and public and private, spaces of governance (including the monitors’ own spaces of civic action).
4. Foster new forms of political power (often for marginalised groups) by operating from informal governance spaces that sit outside of the formal structures of the government and/or private sector.

(Source: drawn from Keane, 2009; with observations taken from Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Roy, 2005; Porter et al., 2011; Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012; Legacy et al., 2014).

Extensive literatures have considered the contributions of technocratic, participatory and neoliberal governance vis-à-vis planning theory and practice; albeit either in relative isolation or as governance binaries (Marinetto, 2003; McGuirk, 2005; MacCallum, 2008; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Bond, 2011; Macleod, 2011; Swyngedouw, 2011). In the late 1990s, Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (1998) provided a critical review of participatory planning within the context of Habermas’ (1984) theory of communicative action. By the early 2000s, McGuirk (2001, p. 198) argued that the communicative rationality (Habermas, 1984) of participatory planning was in conflict with the instrumental rationality (Horkheimer, 1974) that underwrites the technocratic power of planning professionals. Then theories of deliberative democracy began to influence models of participatory planning (Dryzek, 2000), and Maginn (2007) outlined the tensions between deliberative and representative democracy.
for participatory planning. MacCallum (2008) showed the problematic relationship between participatory planning consultation data and the technocratic planning processes that are required to translate these data into planning instruments. Then turning to the emerging hybridity of neoliberal metropolitan planning in the mid 2000s, McGuirk (2005, p. 67) argued that there were “resilient elements of a social democratic project” within the increasing entrepreneurialism of planning governance in NSW. More recently, agonistic theory has been reintroduced to theories of urban governance in an attempt to account for the inherent conflicts that frame complex planning issues (Hillier, 2003; Ploeger, 2004; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; McClymont, 2011; Mouat et al., 2013). Planning theorists such as Allmendinger and Haughton (2012), Taşan-Kok and Baeten (2012) and Bylund (2012), and political economy scholars such as Swyngedouw (2011), have shown, a form of neoliberal spatial governance [is] underpinned by a variety of post-politics that has sought to replace antagonism and agonism with consensus. Conflict has not been removed from planning, but it is instead more carefully choreographed …. (Allmendinger & Haughton, 2012, p. 89)

These debates have traced the subtle changes in the political authority of planning departments and the technocratic power of planning professionals, and the much more significant changes in the participatory and neoliberal governance practices that have been deployed to set the planning agenda and to guide planning decision-making. In these debates the dissident epistemology of agonistic pluralism is re-emerging to challenge the consensus-seeking epistemology of communicative action (Habermas, 1984; Mouffe, 2005). Critiques of consensus-seeking participatory planning by McClymont (2011) and Legacy et al., (2014) have shown that conflict, change and uncertainty should not be viewed as analogous with planning failure. Rather, citizen action in planning matters must be integrated into planning theory in a way that accounts for the combative relationships between stakeholders and the hybrid governance structures that make up contemporary planning systems (McGuirk, 2005). Agonistic theory has refocused our scholarly attention on the power games and conflicts that develop between the stakeholders, as well as the communicative, economic or technocratic management technologies of planners (Hillier, 2003; Mouffe, 2005). Notwithstanding the scholars mentioned above, few attempts have been made to theorise the interrelationships and conflicts that result from assembling all three technocratic, participatory and market-centric planning governance processes together as strategic and regulatory planning policies. These planning governance arrangements are inherently provisional – perhaps most significantly because they are sensitive to state government political party changes.

Drawing on these debates, this article analyses REDWatch’s civic actions in relation to the planning of the Redfern/Waterloo area between 2010 and 2014, in order to further expose the hybridity of the NSW planning system. The analytical focus is on the combative relationships between the various public, private and local citizenry stakeholders in Redfern/Waterloo. The study collected qualitative interview data, qualitative observational data and contextual discursive policy data to explore two initial research questions: what are the formal planning governance mechanisms that are in place (or proposed) for the Redfern/Waterloo area? What are the formal and informal tools of civic action that local residents have gained access to, created or deployed in response to the significant changes that are proposed for the Redfern/Waterloo area? The empirical data is taken from: (i) 10 semi-structured interviews conducted with local and state government bureaucrats, senior government planners and REDWatch members in 2013; (ii) participant observation covering the NSW state government’s community engagement and community consultation planning events at Redfern/Waterloo, 20 community and government meetings, and extensive observation of the community organising efforts of REDWatch and other community interest groups between 2010 and 2014; and (iii) an analysis of 31 policy texts sourced from the NSW Department of Planning, Housing NSW, Redfern/Waterloo Authority, Redfern/Waterloo Partnership Project, the Redfern Waterloo Authority, the Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority and Urban Growth NSW.

A key concern for REDWatch has been how to deal with the agonistic tensions between the relatively powerful NSW state government and private sector stakeholders and the comparatively less powerful local residents and non-government organisations (Mouat et al., 2013). REDWatch did not seek to share
decision-making power or to reach a planning consensus with the NSW state planning and housing departments, or the private sector developer interests. Instead, REDWatch focused on “watching” the government’s planning policies and the private sector’s activities through an informal and Internet enabled monitory process that is external to, but focused on, the formal planning processes for the Redfern/Waterloo area. To present this case, three sections structure the remainder of this article. The first section analyses the NSW state government’s hybrid technocratic, participatory and neoliberal planning system in NSW and shows how this system was applied to the Redfern/Waterloo area. This section shows how this hybrid governance system shaped REDWatch’s civic action in relation to the proposed redevelopment of the Redfern/Waterloo area. The second section draws on the four conceptual features of monitory democracy that were outlined above to analyse REDWatch’s particular form of monitory civic action. The concluding section draws out the local, national and international planning governance lessons to be taken from the REDWatch case.

Planning Governance Hybridity in Redfern/Waterloo

This section shows how the emancipatory practices of participatory planning and the market rationality of neoliberal planning have been grafted onto the technocratic planning process of the NSW planning system (McGuirk, 2005). The aim is to show how this shaped REDWatch’s civic action in the Redfern/Waterloo area. In Australia the constitutional power to restructure Australian cities resides with the states and territories, and through these statutory bodies with the local authorities at the third level of government. Local government is not referred to in the constitution of the Australian Commonwealth, nor does the Commonwealth have any direct political oversight over regulatory or strategic planning in NSW (Gleeson, 2006). In NSW, the elected politicians hold the constitutional authority to set the planning agenda and they hold the ultimate decision-making power. The requirements of technocratic government mean that they defer some of their planning agenda setting and decision-making power to the planning professionals within their departments. However, they can, and indeed they do, recall this power from time-to-time when they override planning decisions or they make planning matters “state significant” (NSW Department of Planning, 2005).

Throughout the latter part of the 20th century, the technocratic power of planning professionals was central to planning agenda setting and decision-making. Over the last decade the technocratic power of government planners has become more peripatetic. Strategic and regulatory planning power is increasingly mobile within government, and new participatory and market-centric governance processes have been fastened to the edges of the NSW planning system (McGuirk, 2001, 2005). At any given time the NSW planning system is a “hybrid” of different planning governance processes (McGuirk, 2005, p. 59). Thus, in practical planning and political terms, the constitutional power to restructure Australian cities resides with the states and territories, and through them the local government authorities. However, a form of new regionalism (Paasi, 2003), which is characteristic of the governments’ intervention in urban policy at the scale of metropolitan regions, rather than at local divisions, is driving a rescaling of the political level at which citizens, businesses and non-government organisations are governed through different planning frameworks. Over the last five years the responsibility for planning governance in NSW has become more fluid and highly politicised as the NSW state and local governments vie for a greater share in the planning governance pie.

For example, in the 2011 NSW state election the major political parties further politicised planning, and in particular participatory planning. The centre-right government came to power on an election platform built around handing planning governance power back to local government authorities and citizens. The 2011 NSW State Plan mirrored this political commitment by stating, “Essential to our strong democracy … [is] enabling citizens to critique government services, and finding more ways to involve people in government decision-making…” (NSW Government, 2011, pp. 55–58). However, in Redfern/Waterloo the various NSW state planning authorities were rescaling the level at which the regulatory planning processes were undertaken for the area. Through this rescaling process the state government removed significant planning approval responsibilities from the local government
authority (City of Sydney) and directed these responsibilities toward the NSW state planning authority (NSW Government, 2013a, 2013b) in an attempt to “fast track” possible infrastructure projects with the private-sector. REDWatch (2011) called on the government to delegate some of their planning agenda setting and perhaps even some of the decision-making power to local residents in the Redfern/Waterloo area. At this time some REDWatch members had taken a particular interest in the possible reduction of public and social housing in the area and they were advocating for a more active role for the local community in deciding the future public and social housing targets. The government’s redevelopment plans proposed population changes that could have resulted in the loss of up to 700 public housing dwellings in the area (Rogers & Darcy, 2014). In June 2011 REDWatch, while monitoring the political rhetoric of the then planning authority (Sydney Metropolitan Development Authority) on their website, stated,

The development of an appropriate and effective planning framework for the future of the social housing sites in Redfern and Waterloo is one of the key priorities for the Redfern-Waterloo Authority (RWA) with the Built Environment Plan Stage 2 (BEP 2) recently announced for community consultation. (citation from an article in ”New Planner” from June 2011, cited by REDWatch: http://www.redwatch.org.au/RWA/bep2/110712rwa)

The electoral promise, that some of the formal planning agenda setting and decision-making power could be relinquished to local residents, combined with the far more modest invitation to local residents to attend a formal state-driven community consultation process on a set of pre-determined planning instruments that eventuated, encapsulates one of the central theoretical problems with bringing technocratic and participatory planning governance processes together. Theoretically, the types of governance statements the NSW state government planning documents were implicated in promoting would have required a restructuring of the representative system of government that currently frames technocratic planning governance in NSW. For the government “to involve people in government decision making” (NSW Government, 2011, p. 55) in the way they had suggested during the electoral campaign would required them to move toward the shared decision-making processes of direct democracy (Farrar, 2007). This was further complicated by the political contestation about where the constitutional authority should be located to set the planning agenda and to exercise decision-making power at the various levels of local and state government in NSW.

What was at stake in these debates was a question about which actors should hold the authority to set the formal planning agenda and to exercise planning decision-making power. What the NSW government was rhetorically proposing would go on to be conceived of as a political challenge to the technocratic power of planning professionals and therefore a challenge to the authority status of government planners (a point the analysis returns to in the next section). Planning governance processes such as community consultation and citizen involvement in decision-making, at least as they appeared in the NSW state government’s electoral statements and planning texts, have their political philosophy roots in theories of more direct forms of democracy (Australian Government, 2011; NSW Government, 2011). In NSW, as in other Australian States and Territories, there is a growing private consultancy sector that “specialises” in these types of stakeholder engagement services, which use models of “collaborative governance” that are based on direct democracy and Habermasian principles (IAP2, 2011; Twyfords, 2012, p. 1). If these more direct models of planning governance were to be successful then some of the sovereign power of the government’s technocratic planners would need to be lodged with an assembly of ordinary local citizens (Farrar, 2007).

In Redfern/Waterloo, REDWatch wanted local community members to have a far greater role to play in setting the planning agenda and exercising decision-making power than the formal community participation events allowed. A REDWatch member stated, “The basic underlining principle [of REDWatch] is that decisions are being made about this community, and this community needs to have the opportunity to input into that” (Interview B). After attending several state-driven community consultation events, REDWatch quickly identified the limitations with the government’s deliberative/communicative forms of formal participatory planning. The REDWatch case demonstrates that what is missing from analyses of these types of formal participatory planning and community consultation events is a focus on the political process – or lack thereof – through which these more direct/
deliberative/communicative processes might be incorporated into technocratic planning systems. If the participatory planning processes that the NSW state government proposed did transfer substantial planning agenda setting and decision-making power to local residents in the Redfern/Waterloo area then this would attenuate the technocratic power that had been deferred to their planning professionals within the various planning authorities. Therefore, the government did not introduce a formal community-level power structure into the planning agenda setting and decision-making process for Redfern/Waterloo.

The NSW government did, however, have a commitment to using market principles to inform their technocratic planning agenda setting and decision-making governance processes for Redfern/Waterloo (McGuirk, 2005). Indeed, the government is not a benign actor in Sydney, but rather a set of federal-state-local government institutions that are collectively responsible for shaping and reshaping the city (McGuirk, 2005). Rather than an inevitable outcome of global economic uncertainty (NSW Government, 2011, 2013a) the governments’ collective decisions to use market-centric planning principles and the private sector as the provider and/or manager of infrastructure is an ideological choice that reshaped their formal planning governance processes. It was a decision that confounded the technocratic power of their planning professionals through the enabling of private sector power structures. It also complicated their reported participatory planning objectives through the possible introduction of additional private sector financiers and developers into the planning agenda setting and decision-making process. Under neoliberal planning regimes the market is positioned as a more “rational” decision-making mechanism than state agents or local citizenries (Harvey, 2005); markets can speak on behalf of local citizenries. In practice, however, even within neoliberal governance structures the elected politicians still hold the constitutional authority to set the planning agenda and to make some of the strategic planning decisions. Nonetheless, neoliberal governance is premised on an assumption that the state should defer some of their agenda setting and decision-making power to market forces and to private sector actors through various contractual arrangements (Harvey, 2005; McGuirk, 2005; Swyngedouw, 2011).

This was certainly the case for the Redfern/Waterloo area and the NSW planning authorities positioned financial evaluation, market conditions and economic performance as important planning drivers and decision-making mechanisms (NSW Department of Planning, 2005; Australian Government, 2011; NSW Government, 2011, 2013a, 2013b). Their planning texts outlined neoliberal urban governance processes that were expected to,

unlock private sector investment by coordinating and delivering lead-in infrastructure and services in development areas, and by planning and fast tracking urban renewal projects. (Urban Growth NSW, 2012, p. 1)

In Redfern/Waterloo these market-centric decision-making conditions made it harder for the local citizenries to contribute to the planning debates about the reconfiguring of their neighbourhood. Within the constraints of this planning hybridity, and formal community consultation events noted above, REDWatch members decided to create their own informal civic space to monitor public and private sector power.

**REDWatch’s Informal Monitory form of Civic Action**

This section shows how REDWatch members integrated their informal citizen action into the government's formal planning practice in a way that accounted for the hybridity of the NSW planning system and the limitations of the formal participatory planning events for their area. It does this by focusing on the four key features of monitory forms of civic action outlined in the introduction, namely: (1) monitoring powerful social actors; (2) encouraging difference, disagreement, debate and change; (3) creating transparency and accountability; and (4) fostering new forms of informal political power.

REDWatch members monitored the formal government statutory and regulatory planning governance changes of the NSW state and local governments closely. They also recorded the written and verbal promises that were made to local citizens and the private sector on their website (see: [http://www.](http://www.))
A REDWatch member stated the organisation started in 2004 because some local residents “want[ed] to move beyond a submission approach to citizen involvement into the Inquiry” into Issues relating to Redfern & Waterloo (Interview A). They “aim[ed] instead to become a pressure group” that soon developed into an organisation with “multi-partisan membership and no political affiliation” (Interview A). This REDWatch member stated that the organisation empowered itself as a collective by renouncing, as much as possible, common ideological, political, economic or interest positions that typically structure local resident action groups. REDWatch members monitored the formal actions of the local and state government and private sector through an informal civic space that was comprised of less powerful local residents and non-government organisations. The monitory focus of REDWatch was not structured around an initial consensus position, nor did the organisation emerge to necessarily participate in the government-orchestrated participatory planning events. When REDWatch launched their website in 2004 to circulate government documents about the area to their members the organisation found there was:

a broad range of people out there who found [the website] useful … the website brought a different dimension to it … We found that a number of community organisations didn't feel like they could say anything about [local planning issues] because it was going to impact on their funding, they were worried that the government would take retribution on them. (Interview C)

REDWatch members found their website had become an important site to hold: (1) local knowledge about the area; (2) the government’s plans for the area; and (3) the government’s history of planning and consultation commitments to local residents. As the various NSW government statutory planning bodies were created and disbanded the REDWatch website, argued a REDWatch member, “operat[ed] like an inconvenient ‘corporate memory’, because stuff disappears from [government web]sites, people move on” (Interview C). Another REDWatch member talked about the monitory and participatory focus of the organisation by stating, the local community:

… needs to know what governments’ thinking, it needs to be able to “reality test” that, because there is a whole pile of [local] knowledge within the community about this community and the sooner you get that on the table, the sooner you are going to get something that is: (a) less divisive; but (b) is likely to address the issues that [government is] trying to address. (Interview B)

By late 2004 the REDWatch website had became a site through which REDWatch members could publish government documents and public statements to push for greater government transparency and accountability in any future development (the analysis returns to REDWatch’s difficulty with realising their participatory planning objectives below). The monitory focus of REDWatch could not emerge as a solidified consensus/interest position because the organisation required a process for mediating between very different “community interests” for the benefit of the “local community”. (REDWatch, 2011, p. 1). REDWatch emerged, almost by necessity, as an organisation that encouraged difference, disagreement, debate and change. For example, one REDWatch member stated,

Now ironically, REDWatch, when it set itself up, was much more interested in having a voice at the table and finding participatory ways for the community to be involved. REDWatch was build not so much around a position in terms of what should happen, but the need for community to be involved in this process, and for the process to deliver a benefit back to the community. (Interview B)

Consensus-seeking models of participatory planning are wholly inadequate to theoretically deal with the way REDWatch members engage in a form of citizen-driven community participation in planning. Theorising the organisation through the principles of agonistic pluralism provides revealing insights about the organisational structure and collective agency of REDWatch members (Mouffe, 1992, 2005; Rogers & Darcy, 2014). Chantal Mouffe’s agonistic pluralism thesis has recently been brought to bear on planning issues (McClymont, 2011; Mouat et al., 2013) to expose the “permanence of conflict, non-reciprocity and domination (i.e. of agonism)” to “productively explain some of the power games enacted in planning decision-making” (Hillier, 2003, p. 37). An emerging body of planning literature and empirical studies have demonstrated the benefits of agonistic participatory planning as a counterbalance to consensus-seeking participatory planning (Hillier, 2003; Pløger, 2004; Bäcklund & Mäntysalo, 2010; Bond, 2011; McClymont, 2011; Mouat et al., 2013). As Mouffe’s (1992) work shows,
the ideas of pluralism, conflict and difference have long been central to political philosophy. Along similar lines of inquiry, Keane's (2009) work on the concept of “monitory democracy” inscribes conflict and insurgency – agonism – into the very functionality of civic action. When used to assess the actions of REDWatch members, the organisation is exposed as essentially expansionist. REDWatch operates by making democracy workable through seeking to expand the number of civic actors that have access to information about the Redfern/Waterloo area, and REDWatch members seek to expand the number of sites for through which civic action takes place.

Monitory forms of civic action encourage citizens and organisations to monitor and discipline the power of individuals, the government and private corporations. Keane writes (2009, p. 958), “Experiments with fostering new forms of citizens’ participation and elected representation have even penetrated markets, to lay hands on the sacred cow of private property”. The utility of monitory forms of civic action is that they can account for the civic and political processes that operate across formal and informal planning modalities and boundaries. The social actors involved in monitory forms of civic action ignore the formal/informal conceptual binary as a basic constituent of their social action. REDWatch members’ informal monitory forms of participation in planning operated alongside the technocratic power structures of the NSW state government because this small group of citizens does not attempt to share planning agenda setting or decision-making power with the government to exercise power. Hence, their monitory civic actions are not framed by, but rather worked alongside of, the rules of political engagement that guide the government’s strategic and regulatory planning frameworks.

REDWatch members do not need to be invited into a participatory planning space by the NSW state government, rather they create and invite themselves into their own civic space of action (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), and they encourage the broader citizenry to use the information on their website do the same. For example, through their website, REDWatch members published the “REDWatch Community Participation Principles” in 2004, which they put forward “in light of the criticism that had been levelled against the government’s poor track record of consultation in Redfern/Waterloo” (REDWatch, 2011, p. 1). To mediate between the very different “community interests” in the area REDWatch members focused on ensuring greater government transparency and working within the NSW state government’s technocratic and legal frameworks, such as the Government Information Public Access Act (NSW Government, 2009). REDWatch members built relationships with journalists and academics to encouraged these actors to engage in their own monitory civic acts by publishing a diverse range of information and views through wider academia and media publications. These publications were then redirected back to the local community through the REDWatch website. This diversifying of the social actors, socio-political analyses and publication outputs further disables a solidified interest position for the organisation and results in greater transparency and accountably for the NSW state government. Thus these informal monitory forms of civic action operate from outside the boundaries of formal state- and private-sector-sanctioned participatory planning events for Redfern/Waterloo. However, they are still bound by the rules of political engagement that guide the NSW state government’s technocratic planning system.

This is an agonistic form of monitory citizen participation because REDWatch members have established a set of inclusionary rights through the collation of diverse, even contradictory, local, private sector and government knowledges about the Redfern/Waterloo area on their website. They made these knowledges openly available to all citizens and organisations, and they invited everyone to monitor the NSW state government’s various statutory planning bodies for the benefit of the local community. The extensive uptake of these knowledges was unexpected by REDWatch members. Interviews and website reports suggest that the following people regularly accessed this information: local public, social and private renters, private homeowners, urban researchers, university students, journalists, non-government organisations, private sector employees and government planners (see: Rogers & Darcy, 2014). A REDWatch member agued that they encourage these individuals and local citizenries to “do their own research and analysis” to monitor the NSW state government and the private sector (Interview D). REDWatch members never sought to share political power or to set the planning agenda with government at the local level. For the most part, REDWatch members operated outside the NSW state government’s
formal “community engagement” and “community consultation” planning events in Redfern/Waterloo. Although some members attended these events to collect information about the government’s planning programs and the private sector plans for the area in order to share this information on the website.

As an organisation, REDWatch is a hybrid of divergent forms of political identification and action. However, there are limits to REDWatch members’ attempts to move beyond a local resident action group model that is post-consensus and framed by agonism and difference. In conflict with their internal agonism and the monitory focus of their civic actions is a more subtle structural discourse of organisational consensus. REDWatch members combine their monitory civic actions with an attempt to directly shape the urban agenda of the NSW state government by formally responding, as an organisation, to the government’s White Papers and other planning submission requests. The organisation’s spokesperson is regularly invited to meet with and/or address senior government planners, politicians, urban planning students, the media and other interest groups. A REDWatch member stated that this has allowed the organisation to voice political concerns and to monitor the activities of government and their statutory planning authorities on behalf of their members, who might not have wanted to voice their concerns publicly (Interview C). For example, REDWatch members share collective concerns for, but disagree about what should be done about, the following key issues for the area: strategic planning for the area; public housing; industrial era heritage sites; the Central (station) to Eveleigh (suburb) railway corridor and land acquisition by the University of Sydney in Darlington (see: http://www.redwatch.org.au/).

However, a senior government planner argued that REDWatch (the organisation) is “not representative of that community … [and] they have a limited understanding of the perspective of community interests … [they] focus on process rather than the key issues” (Interview I). The solicited and unsolicited consensus statements that are issued by REDWatch, as a unified group, certainly reify a set of seemingly shared community interests and concerns. This creates a tension between their consensus-seeking activities and their agonistic membership structure and their members’ monitory forms of citizen participation. REDWatch’s organisational consensus statements represent consolidated interest positions, and this has opened the organisation up to methodological critique and claims of NIMBYism (Devine-Wright, 2009). Thus, even within this insurgent civic organisation that was built on the principles of agonistic pluralism, openness, transparency and monitory civic action, the political pressure to form a community consensus seems ubiquitous.

Indeed, the NSW planning system seemed to necessitate this form of knowledge formulation, only to later discredit the consensus/interest positions on methodological grounds relating to sampling validity, cohort representation/reliability and NIMBYism (Devine-Wright, 2009). Insurgent publics, such as REDWatch, create unique planning governance dilemmas for professional planners through their informal, citizen-driven and agonistic engagement with planning processes (Swyngedouw, 2011). For example, a senior government planning professional challenged the reported success of REDWatch’s monitory form of civic action and their agonistic form of political organisation. This planner suggested that insurgent citizen action, because it is deployed from outside of the government’s formal planning system, undermines the expertise of government’s planning professionals. In the Redfern/Waterloo case, argued this planner, it introduced “economic and timing inefficiencies” into what is an essentially technocratic planning system in NSW (Interview J). This exposes the enabling and disabling democratic potential of insurgent citizen action. Local consensus/interest positions are often discredited or undermined as NIMBYism (Devine-Wright, 2009) and state-sanctioned community consultations provide local citizenries with limited opportunity to set the planning agenda or to hold decision-making power. Therefore, REDWatch members’ monitory civic action presents an interesting alternative case. Their monitory political actions, such as information sharing and using the website as a form of “institutional or corporate memory”, are, in many respects, more democratic, ethically utilitarian and politically agonistic. However, a senior government planner found these processes problematic also, arguing, again, that they undermine the government’s technocratic planning process (Interview J). This senior government planner argued that REDWatch members published “off-the-record” discussions and materials; “… things go up on the website that aren’t signed off on [by the government] and these
discussions could have been used to achieve greater outcomes for the local community” (Interview J). Another senior government planner argued that,

They attack what they can see. What remains hidden within the government system, that the government keeps secret, remains off the[ir] agenda … REDWatch are missing the important “internal” issues, because these are internal to government. (Interview H)

These senior government planners argued that a form of agonistic politics structured the NSW state government’s internal (non-public) technocratic planning agenda setting and decision-making processes too. “Remember”, argued another senior planner, “there are internal disagreements within and between the government departments” about the planning of Redfern/Waterloo (Interview J). Notwithstanding these important objections and political critiques, the senior government planners’ statements about the affects of REDWatch’s civic action on the government’s formal planning processes for Redfern/Waterloo were insightful. Several senior planners argued that REDWatch had an effect from inside government by informing their technocratic planning practices. One stated, “Thousands of dollars of bureaucratic time are wasted on responding to their requests by senior government personnel” (Interview H). Another argued, “You don’t know how much work REDWatch creates for us, hours and hours of work to go through their submissions and letters, [so we can] write responses …” (Interview J). Another senior government planner reported that “we go to the REDWatch website when we want to find out what’s happening in the area” (Interview F). Another stated, “I could argue for better outcomes – ‘internal accountability’ – because REDWatch are there ready to critique us” (Interview K). These comments demonstrate that, at least to some degree, some government planners amended their internal planning actions and approach to planning governance as a result of REDWatch members’ monitory forms of civic action. These government planners used the monitory status of REDWatch to internally advocate for different planning outcomes for the Redfern/Waterloo area.

Conclusion

The planning lessons from the REDWatch case operate across the entire planning governance hierarchy, from the local informal actions of citizens, to the formal planning policy responses of state governments, through to the national and international level of planning for so-called global cities. At the local level, REDWatch members advocate for greater social and spatial justice for the area, but unlike other consensus-seeking interest groups they operated by placing limits on their collective political identity. Certainly, the capacity to restrain private sector power is still located with the elected politicians and their planning departments, however, the power to better integrate citizen action into planning governance partly resides, as it always has, with the citizens themselves within technocratic planning systems. REDWatch members refused to be drawn into the NSW state government’s participatory planning events as the only way to “have a say” about the planning of the Redfern/Waterloo area (NSW Government, 2013b, p. 2). REDWatch members focused on monitoring the local and state governments’ planning processes, and the decisions and actions of the public and private sectors. They argued that their website is enabling various local citizenries to reclaim political power and autonomy by combining: the freedom to call the government and private-sector actors to account for their actions; with a responsibility to these social actors and to the border citizenry that they undertake this politics through an open and democratic process. This is a form of monitory civic participation that is not driven by a hard-line or solidified interest/consensus position that is deployed within formal participatory planning events that are designed by governments or their agents. What is radical about REDWatch is that the organisation itself is structured, to some degree, by the principles of agonistic pluralism. The civic spaces of the organisation provided a range of vehicles through which a diversity of views, concerns, opinions and local knowledges could be stewarded, across a range of constitutional, legal and financial demarcations, to monitor public and private power.

REDWatch members do not form an interest group per se, but an agonistic collective of different interest positions within an organisation that has internal cultural, social, economic and political
pluralism. REDWatch members were driven by a broad organisation mission to validate and make publicly available information, which was formerly considered invalid or classified as confidential, to ensure that there was more information and analysis of planning issues in the public debate. They informally facilitated a wider public debate that emanates from outside of the NSW state government’s planning frameworks and the government’s state-sanctioned participatory planning events. This type of citizen-driven urban politics is not necessarily about statutory or regulatory planning frameworks or planners’ attempts to navigate intractable planning conflicts or insurgent publics. Instead, it is about how citizens seek social and spatial justice for their local areas in ways that intersect with planning frameworks and governments. In this sense REDWatch members’ monitory approaches to planning governance will never become a model for formal participatory planning. These practices, rather, represent the re-establishment of pre-deliberative/communicative models of informal citizen action and activism in the planning of their cities.

At the state government level, the government finds itself in a hybrid planning governance dilemma. While assembling their technocratic, participatory and neoliberal planning governance processes, across the different scales of government, they opened a rhetorical invitation to an ever-expanding suite of citizenries, businesses and organisations into the planning agenda setting and decision-making process. At this level, an analysis of a single planning governance process (e.g. community consultation event or participatory planning policy) is too narrow to determine the civic and planning utility of citizen involvement in planning. By expanding the analytical borderland beyond the formal planning system, from the government’s planning frameworks toward a much broader suite of civic processes, this analysis opens up the debate about how to deal with conflict and difference through a much broader suite of civic actions. Within the NSW state government’s strategic and regulatory planning frameworks democracy is given no universality as an ideal. The participatory planning objectives presuppose an accumulative equalisation or consensus of direct citizen power, while the neoliberal planning objectives stand in stark contrast by promoting the democratising potential of competitive individualism and market rule through increasing private-sector power. The democratic systems of Western style governments are premised on a basic precondition that citizens have the freedom to question the power of their sovereign rulers – be they state or market rulers. Building participatory and neoliberal planning together, which required the market and local citizenries to become arbitrary planning agenda setters and decision-makers, has proved duplicitous and unworkable in NSW. As some of the government planners made clear in this study while reflecting on the hybridity of the NSW planning system, by devolving some of their planning agenda setting and decision-making power to the market or to local citizens the government department thereby violates some of the democratic principles that underwrite the technocratic power of their planning professionals and departments.

At the international level, citizens in Western style democracies have always monitored governments as an essential part of their representative system of government. Local citizenries and local non-government organizations have access to a very large corpus of information that can be used to monitor the local, state and federal governments in a range of ways and to pursue a range of different interests. These monitoring processes are not antithetical to democracy. Quite the contrary, they build from and require the political tools of representative democracy when they draw on civic processes such as freedom of information requests, knowledge sharing across constituencies, lobbying politicians and engaging with the media and law courts. Monitory forms of civic action do not operate with the political unity that is required of consensus-seeking models of participatory planning. Indeed, they demonstrate that these types of planning governance processes might not be very productive spaces through which citizens can have a significant input in the planning of global cities.

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