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**Exploring Punctuated Equilibrium in Planning: are 2004 and 2011 policy  
punctuations?**

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*Abstract: Following the work of Baumgartner and Jones (1993), Baumgartner et al (2009) and John and Bevan (2012), policy development is characterised by longer tails of policy equilibrium which are punctuated by policy peaks or events. This approach is based on the assumption that there are long periods of relative stability and incrementalism in policy making but the peaks are more intensive because of their infrequency and as such can be seen as Kuhnian paradigm shifts or 'catastrophes'. Much of the recent work that has been undertaken has been to examine whether such punctuations exist in the UK legislative programmes (John and Margetts, 2003; Jennings and John, 2009; John and Jennings, 2010; John and Bevan, 2012). The purpose of this paper is to consider the applicability of the concept of punctuated equilibrium to planning policy 'events'. This paper will further explore whether the planning legislative 'moments' in 2004 and 2011 can be appropriately designated as policy punctuations and what policy impulses might be at work that energise these critical events in planning.*

## **Introduction**

Since the introduction of the modern planning system through the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, planning legislation and practice have continued to evolve and develop, with each successive reform being overlaid on what has gone before in a sedimented or geological policy formation (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2004). Whilst much of this planning reform can be described as incremental, in response to legal judgements, unintended consequences of legislation or the application of administrative procedures tested through judicial review, there have been points in the legislative narrative which have been pivotal, acting as hinges between the prevailing system and a restructured approach. These points of change may not be embodied in single pieces of legislation but may extend over short time periods. As planning policy and accompanying legislation are seen as a combined and cumulative process, there has been less discussion about these specific pivotal points, their development, temporality (John and Bevan, 2012) and the continuity of the argumentation used to support their introduction (Cullingworth, 1970; Cullingworth and Nadin, 1996; 2006). In some cases these changes have been associated with ideological (Thornley, 1991; Haughton et al, 2010) or economic narratives (Pugalis and Townsend, 2010, 2012) which may address the surface presentation of the specific policy turn but there has been less examination of the episodic nature of these agenda re-setting events.

This paper sets out to investigate this issue through the use of a specific policy theory, that of punctuated equilibrium (Baumgartner and Jones 1993) that is located within government agenda setting discourse (Kingdon, 2003). Punctuated equilibrium has primarily been a lens through which mainstream legislative programmes and key budget decisions made by central government are examined. Within the UK context this has been developed into a discussion of the key drivers of agenda change through an examination of annual policy and legislative programmes as set out in the annual Queen's Speech (John and Margetts, 2003; John and Jennings, 2011, John and Bevan, 2012). Although periodisation and impulses for major policy turns have been identified, John and Bevan (2012) have firstly focused on fragmented vs. partisan approaches to policy agenda setting and then developed this into a consideration of the planning agenda in particular. John and Jennings (2011) have identified other drivers of the agenda setting change

agenda such as external shocks but they have not discussed these in detail and this issue will be specifically considered later in this paper.

The first part of this paper examines the theory of punctuated equilibrium as a mechanism of policy agenda setting and its temporal extension which, in turn, is now being used as a technology to promote change (Bulmer, 2012; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling, 2012). The second part of the paper undertakes an analysis of the drivers and shapers of key planning policy 'events' since 1947 and sets these within a wider political and governmental context. The third part of the paper will consider the application of the theory of punctuated equilibrium to these pivotal planning events to assess whether it provides at least a partial insight into the framing of policy reforms at these formative moments. The paper will conclude with a discussion on what has been found.

### **1. The role of punctuated equilibrium in public policy agenda setting**

The development of the theory of punctuated equilibrium has been set in realist assessments of governments' agenda setting policy in practice (Kingdon, 2003), that is why specific areas of policy have attracted most finance and/or legislative attention. Punctuated equilibrium has its origins in the Darwinian model of evolution with its mix of slow change and rapid punctuating events (Eldredge and Gould, 1972). It has been developed as a concept of change in the ways in which organisations work (Gersick, 1991; Romanelli and Tushman, 1994) with a consideration of the forces both for persistence and change. Gersick argues that periods of persistence or stability are important in accommodating change and normalising practices that follow periods of more dynamic activity whereas punctuated equilibrium is characterised by more revolutionary activity which can change the rules of the game or even the game itself.

Periods of policy persistence or stability can be seen to be normative, based on internal organisational relationships (Romanelli and Tushman, 1994) or stereotypes (John and Margetts, 2003). However, there are fewer explanations for the periods of dynamic change, not least as the recognition of the need for change may not generate the change directly. Meyer (1982) and Meyer et al (1992) suggest that change may be in response to external environmental conditions or in response to crises. Punctuated equilibrium theory attempts to identify why some of these policy agendas emerge as events that are more important at some times than

others and what drives these emergences. Although the term punctuated equilibrium is used in this theory, there is a similarity with Kuhnian paradigm shifts (1962) and catastrophe theory (Thom, 1993).

Beneath the attempts to identify the impulse that generates a policy punctuation there is a process of agenda setting (Kingdon, 2003) where a coalition of interests builds towards an agreement that such change is required. In these processes of agenda setting much of the discussion is about the methods used in problematising (Rochefort and Cobb, 1994) or framing the issue (Goffman, 1975) as these will have an influence on the potential methods for contextualising and forming the narrative arc within which the policy's emergence, characterisation and solution will be set. In order to achieve public and cross-sectoral acceptance of change these issues of policy narratology (Czarniawska, 2010) are central to success. There is also a need to consider the tone of the policy changes being proposed that is whether the changes are being introduced to focus on improvement or some beneficial change or whether they are about responding to a problem that is harmful or is the focus of public concern (Baumgartner and Jones, 1994; Givel, 2010).

Baumgartner and Jones (1993) have developed this approach into a consideration of policy agendas in central government policy making where the same set of institutions and rules produce both periods of equilibrium and punctuated change (True et al, 2006) and where major changes in direction or redefinition can occur (Cairney, 2012). What is of particular interest in this approach is the insertion of the interactions of multilevel governance as a means of explaining patterns of stability and equilibrium which makes it of particular interest in the operation of the UK planning system which is institutionally multi-level in its design and operation, operating within tiers of state and sub-state government and within the governance framework provided by EU treaties and protocols (Duhr et al, 2010; Faludi, 2011). Baumgartner and Jones (1993) argue that the mobilization of contestation between governance scales creates the conditions for change and once a policy area is in 'play' it will be accessed by other interests and wider government actors who see these fractures as openings for their own agendas and the realignment of power. These interests may act together or independently (True et al 2006).

The state of equilibrium can be generated by a dominant force or ideology in government or political forces that cancel out each other (Cairney, 2012: 177). Periods of equilibrium are also 'owned' by professional and organisational interests usually characterised as policy communities that manage internal rule interpretation and external system boundaries (Keating et al, 2009). Each policy area might be managed by overlapping policy communities that provide core consensus but peripheral differentiation that appeals to variegated constituencies. Internal contestation between policy communities is self managed although influenced through privileged access to information to wider system owners, usually seen as the government but also in the case of the UK, the EU.

Punctuated equilibrium theory is located within the US model where the constitution reinforces the checks and balances between interests and governance scales. In this model there is a constant battle to promote issues into or out of legislation using techniques such as venue shopping, where sites and scales of engagement can be critical to success. In Europe, since the Treaty of Rome 1957, and the creation of the EU, policy agenda setting and subsequent legislative action has to be seen through the tropes and techniques of multi-level governance (MLG) (Morphet, 2013). However, it is argued that the impulse for action in the EU has been through internal integration drivers (Princen and Rhinard, 2007; Rhinard, 2010) or through the implementation of external agreements - specifically those concluded between the EU and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) (Young, 2011).

When agenda setting is considered within the EU context, Princen and Rhinard (2006) argue that the processes that precipitate policy punctuations operate within this multi-level governance frame, where both the macro and meso levels of government have dynamic interaction and engagement with policy agenda setting. Both will use policy venue shopping in different ways that suit macro and meso level policy locations. In this context, the role of MLG has not been to set agendas but to be responsible for their development, endorsement and implementation. Thus for those countries that are members of the EU, this external/internal agenda setting impetus can be hybrid in its nature and it can be difficult to isolate the provenance of specific policy impulses and implementation styles as Governments seek to retain policy 'ownership' (Knill and Lenschow, 2001).

The development of policy agendas can also be mobile (McCann, 2012; Healey, 2012), can be the subject of policy transfer and owned by policy communities or networks (Morphet 2013). Where change occurs this can be through multiple events within a period of small explosions (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) as well as single episodic events such as machinery of government changes through legislation, political parties in power or change in Ministerial and/or departmental responsibilities (Davis et al, 1999).

However, there remains the issue as to why specific policy narratives or themes are selected for action above others. What are the impulses for change? Or as Kingdon puts it 'How does an idea's time come?' (2003:1). Kingdon's response is to categorise agenda setting impulses into problems, policy and politics (ibid: 16). Problems can be determined by crises or external events and capture the need for action in the public's attention. When policy drives change, this can be as a result of policy communities or other interests promoting change in their specific area usually through the means of evidence, lobbying and mobilising public attention or through presenting different versions of reality or outcomes as a result of policy intervention (Rocheftort and Cobb, 1994). The role of politics in determining the place of any issue on a policy agenda is related to political parties and their prevailing ideologies. Actions can be taken which are derived from party ideology translated through election commitments. This political ideology can also be filtered through the issues selected from 'problems' or 'policies', how they are framed and then the lens through which the urgency of current or proposed changes is viewed. However, there may be an illusion of alternatives in the politics of policy agendas, suggesting that all problematising is culturally constrained and this has an important role in framing expectations of solutions (Bosso, 1994: 183).

Jones and Baumgartner (2005) identify five key factors that lead to the 'tipping point' or policy agenda breakthrough that demands the attention of senior politicians on one policy area above others. These factors are supported through the work of others. Thus the key impulses for agenda setting that lead to policy punctuations have been identified as:

1. **external** pressure or shock
2. **ideological** change associated with political or leadership change;
3. policy **challenge** from competing interests);
4. public **concerns** expressed through debate e.g. on health and safety issues

## 5. policy **malaise** and a need to ‘catch up’

Considering each of these factors in turn, external pressures for policy change can be generated through international agreements and treaties such as those on world trade through the WTO, the environment through the UN or human development through UNCTAD (Givel, 2010; Rochefort and Cobb, 1994; John and Jennings 2010). These external pressures may also be informal rather than through specific legal agreements such as through (i) comparative assessments of performance between nations as are undertaken by the OECD as exemplified through the pressures on UK housing policy (OECD, 2011; Andre, 2011; CEC, 2012), (ii) fashion such as the new economic geography prompted by Krugman et al, (1999) or (iii) informal influence such as occurs at international events such as the World Economic Forum held annually in Davos. These external pressures can create the context for change but events such as general elections where there is a change in political power can lead to the second impulse for a policy punctuation that is through a change in ideology (Romanelli and Tushman, 1994). Such ideological changes may give rise to significant shifts in policy expressed in party manifestos and implemented through the machinery of government (Davis et al, 1999) or legislative events (John and Margetts, 2003) although they can also influence persistent policies through the mechanisms of interpretation and implementation. These two policy impulses are more likely within a UK setting than the third, of policy challenge which is more prevalent in the United States where there are competing claims for policy attention set up in the constitution (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993).

On the fourth impulse for punctuated equilibrium, the role of public debate can be associated with single issues or events (Meyer, 1982; Meyer et al 1990; Baumgartner and Jones, 1994). This may be in response to a natural disaster such as flooding, a specific horrific act such as that associated with child cruelty or a turn in public mood such as politician’s social circle or expenses in a period of austerity. The political response here is frequently to push the issue up the political agenda and to legislate quickly such as in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1997, hold public inquiries into flooding (e.g. the Pitt Review 2008) or hold individual politicians to account for their actions within legal procedures. Issues can snowball in the media, or become bandwagons (Halpin, 2011) through public response through e-petitions. In these cases politicians are keen to respond quickly to improve their public standing. These issues can be specific in comparison say with

issue five of policy malaise where there is a general build up of a pressure to change across a wider policy spectrum (Gersick, 1991; Kingdon, 2003).

Policy catch up may also represent a new approach to an old or pre-existing problem (Kingdon, 2003). The impulse generated may propel a policy on to the agenda as an issue whose time has come for the external appearance of action or recreated as a novel issue that engages macro-governmental interest and priority (Jones, 1994). At this point, Givel (2010) argues that ownership will shift from the 'monopolistic' policy community that has been managing incremental change and persistence to one that is in a pan-governmental 'market' and focussed on change. There is an assumption that the monopolistic interests of policy communities 'capture' specific policies for a period and are reluctant to give them up for change. However an alternative reading might suggest a lack of interest from policy agenda managers once the policy reconstruction and reform moment has passed. In public policy making, novelty is currency (Mulgan, 2009). Policy agenda setting may be an act of attention to 'system stewardship' (Hallsworth, 2011), that is intervention to ensure that the newly adopted policy conforms to the agenda as set but once change has been effected, there is no interest in policy implementation operation thereafter.

The approaches that are taken to conceptualise, problematise or frame the policy may be path-dependent, based on historic institutionalism but this may be temporarily or permanently interrupted at points of major change (Bulmer, 2012). Action on an issue on a policy agenda may return the policy to its former keepers and policy communities or it may form a new policy agenda where past owners may need to switch or find that their management of the issue is diluted by new ownership which has been an intended consequence of the reform. In this case path dependency may be seen to be the problem and not part of the solution.

A key issue in the consideration of punctuated equilibrium theory is the extent to which there can be prediction of the disruptive episodes - whether they are either planned events or contained shocks. However, Bulmer (2012) reverses this argument by exploring the extent to which there can be a programme of planned shocks or changes which have the effect of punctuating equilibrium and which are designed to jolt the system in this way. So whilst much of the literature on punctuated equilibrium is concerned with the potential predictability of it as a

theory, this temporal model suggests that punctuated equilibrium is being used as a mechanism that is a technology of change (Bulmer, 2012; Goetz and Meyer-Sahling, 2012). In this use, punctuated equilibrium theory is being used as a means of modelling or emulating the stability of policy environments (Bosso, 1994) and then predicting the way in which this stability can be changed through the use of punctuations to the system. This can be seen as a variant on venue shopping and replacing it with temporal shopping (Pierson, 2004). As a type of intervention, this might be used when there are political changes in elected governments or at other similar points such as those grouped under machinery of government changes in the UK (Morphet, 2013). It can also be used when no other obvious means of inserting change appears to be available.

The use of the temporal version of punctuated equilibrium is being increasingly associated with the way in which the EU operates. The use of temporality to promote change has been discussed in terms of both the EU's internal and external agendas. Rhinard (2010) suggests that the external negotiations that the EU undertakes on behalf of the member states can be used as a means to influence wider agendas both internal and external through the use of policy deals that bleed across the whole agenda. Internally, Goetz and Meyer-Sahling (2012) are interested in the ways in which time has been developed into an institutional property into decision making within the EU and the dependencies that it creates with member states' internal time horizons for elections and policy cultures. Like Kingdon (2003), Goetz and Meyer-Sahling also consider this issue on three dimensions - polity, politics and policy, and although not exactly the same, the degree of overlap is useful in considering the relationship between temporal institutionalism and agenda setting. Here the politics of problem definition is replaced by the control over the ordering of agendas and prompts for action created by pre-agreed programmatic approaches. In this it is suggested that the process sets the opportunity to create the agenda and, as Rhinard (2010) indicates, it is this control over the agenda which is critical.

Thus, Baumgartner and Jones list of factors energising policy impulses has been extended to include two further factors - temporal and programmatic approaches and these factors are all discussed further below.

6. **timing** - choosing a temporal reason to act
7. pre-agreed policy agenda and commitments - the **programmed** approach

This further consideration of the use of punctuated equilibrium theory is useful in demonstrating the ways in which policy agendas and cycles are used within the EU and in addition create a seventh lens through which to consider the generation of policy impulses, that of a programmatic or pre-agreed agenda. In this case, longer term intentions may be advanced when the time is seen to be 'right' and this policy agenda can only be achieved through step change. One potential temporal opportunity is at the point of General Elections when there are changes in the party in power. However, as John and Jennings (2011) have demonstrated in the UK, this linkage is not apparent and rather there have been other periods when legislative agendas have demonstrated energy and activity. These are discussed in more detail in the following section.

What are the criticisms of punctuated equilibrium as an approach? Givel argues that the theory is compromised because firstly it is based only on the early model of punctuated equilibrium used by Eldredge and Gould and does not reflect their later modifications to their approach which moved towards a theory of evolutionary pluralisms. That is that some change is salational or Kuhnian, whilst other change could be gradual. Some studies have also found no presence of punctuated equilibrium (Givel, 2010; Cashore and Howlett, 2007) and Givel ascribes this lack of compliance with punctuated equilibrium theory to the particular method that was used to examine the approach. Thirdly, Cairney (2012) argues that as a theory it may only be applicable in some institutional cases.

All these criticisms are valid, but punctuated equilibrium theory undoubtedly draws important attention to agenda setting in government and leads to an examination of the ways in which this occurs. In the US system, the competing approaches between interests are uppermost in the consideration but this neglects other ways in which changes are made particularly as in the UK when policy punctuations may be generated by different factors including external impulses. The role of MLG remains an important consideration in both approaches, but unlike the US model, MLG may be viewed in the UK as an external factor rather than an internal pressure.

## **2. Planning's key moments**

In applying the theory of punctuated equilibrium in the UK, through an analysis of the Queen's Speech, John and Jennings (2010) identify policy change over time.

They identify three key periods of policy and legislative agenda expansion which they designate as post-war (1946-8); post-1960s (1968-1970) and post-Thatcher (1990-2). They also identify the 1970s and 1980s as periods of agenda and policy contraction. Also all these periods that are identified as policy active by John and Jennings were not immediately after a change in political party following a general election but well on the life cycle of that party's period of control, that is in their second or third term of office. Although John and Bevan (2012) note this, they do not offer any specific arguments for the implications of temporality on policy agenda setting.

The development of planning legislation since 1947 has been continuous and cumulative with one piece of legislation built upon another, interceded through government policy and moderated by legal interpretation and judgements. However there have been a number of key periods when planning legislation has taken a decisive turn in its application and approach to its core components of development planning and development management. What is interesting to note is that planning policy punctuations occurred in all four of the active policy periods identified by John and Bevan (2012). These four periods 1947-9; 1968-72; 1990-1992 and 2000-2004 are characterised by fundamental changes in the nature of development planning and its relationship to the determination of planning applications.

In all of these policy agendas, development plans have always been comprised of a strategic and local dimension - sometimes in the same document and at other times in complementary or mutually supporting roles. However the relationship between the development plan and the determination of planning applications has shifted at each of these punctuations between deterministic (1947 and 1990) to formative (1968 and 2004) constructs. In 1968 the formative nature of this relationship was characterised as the plan being one material consideration amongst others, whereas in 2004 it could be argued that environmental assessments of specific proposals could overturn the plan led approach. Since 2004, national planning policies as set out in the 2008 Town and Country Planning Act and 2011 Localism Act and security considerations (DCLG, 2012) take precedence.

Each of these four policy agenda episodes was set within the context of perceived problems with the prevailing system. The Development Plan process established in

1947 privileged the counties and county boroughs with a smaller number of local plans prepared in areas where change was identified as being required. These plans were set in a national planning policy framework set by government and conflicts between different government departments in policy and the use of specific sites was the responsibility of regionalised civil servants (Cullingworth, 1970). In this first iteration of development plans, the land use zoning in the plan guaranteed development consent for that use. The plan was also accompanied by a programme map that identified the actions to be taken by the local authority in leading the implementation of the development plan in five year periods.

However, progress in plan making was slow and the Government sponsored Planning Advisory Group (MHLG, 1965) proposed changes in the system that redefined the roles of central and local government and made a major change in the system. The first wave of development plans had provided clear guidance on land-use zones, which provided certainty for land owners and developers but no public policy flexibility. Secondly, these plans were seen to be quickly out of date and thirdly there was poor public acceptability of the proposals in the plans. Finally plan preparation was slow and the expected five year reviews for those plans that had been completed dragged on beyond this period (Cullingworth, 1970, 89). Change was also seen to be needed to accompany the expected restructuring of local government geographies and functions from the early 1970s (Ross, 1967).

The 1968 Town and Country Planning Act established a system of development plans which comprised structure and local plans, that were based on a strong survey or evidence base but which could be more flexible in presentation and interpretation. Unlike the previous system, the existence of a policy or indication of proposals on a general diagram did not guarantee planning consent for the applicant and the plan was one material consideration amongst others. This position was reinforced through policy statements made by Ministers such as that by Nicholas Ridley the then Secretary of State in *Lifting the Burden* (DoE, 1985) who was credited as using this attempted planning deregulation as a means of dismantling the system. The implementation of the new development plan system after 1968 was slow and it took 14 years for all structure plans to be completed for the first time (Cullingworth and Nadin 1994). This slow progress held back the preparation of local plans and resulted in much informal policy making (Bruton and

Nicholson, 1987; Healey, 1983). The flexibility introduced into the system was seen to hamper development by providing no certainty to land owners.

The 1989 White Paper on *The Future of Development Plans* proposed changes to the system that were introduced in 1990 through the Town and Country Planning Act. Here the primacy of the plan was returned to the system rather than being one material consideration in determining planning applications. The preparation of district (local) plans became mandatory and the strategic and local plans were fused into unitary development plans (UDP). The new UDP system was slow to be implemented and by 2000 few plans had been prepared and adopted. In 1988, the CBI and TUC undertook a joint study on planning which called for more speed, responsiveness and certainty in planning and greater consistency between policies. There was also seen to be a need for greater coordination between the policies of local authorities as a whole and the local planning system. There were over 15000 consultation responses to the planning Green Paper (ODPM, 2001). and 86% of respondents did not want to see any change in the UDP system (Cullingworth and Nadin, 2006). The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 removed structure plans and replaced their role in strategic policy making by Regional Spatial Strategies.

The changes were expected to produce a number of new plans although by 2012, less than half of local authorities have a newly adopted local plan (PINS, 2012). The strategic element of the Development Plan provided through Regional Spatial Strategies has been abolished firstly by the Labour Government in Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 and then their successors plans, regional Strategies created though the 2009 legislation were revoked by the Coalition Government in 2010. This leaves a single set of plans that are coterminous with local authority boundaries, the potential for neighbourhood or parish plans beneath this and for strategic plan making to be made through the exercise of the duty to cooperate and/or voluntary agreements to share strategic planning functions between local authorities in joint committees.

So what does this brief chronology of planning reform tell us? Firstly, the changes in the system through new legislation seem to have been driven almost entirely from within government and expressed through the work of internal working groups or White Papers. Although there were criticisms of the system, in terms of either

its lack of certainty or lack of flexibility by all sectors at different times, at each turn there has been a slow response to plan making by local authorities and frequently antagonist approaches to change by planners. Secondly we can note that these periods of change were not in the first terms of government following a change in political power in a general election although as noted earlier they did appear as part of wider active periods of legislative reform. Thirdly the problematising of the need to reform appears to be the same in each case and no new factors seem to emerge to change the overall framing of planning activity.

Looking beyond the planning agenda, what is also interesting to note but frequently overlooked is that planning reform has been associated with local government reform. In the 1968 reforms there was an assumption but into the reforms that local government would be reformed in a specific way (Ross, 1967) and indeed much of the roll-out of the new planning process was held back until the restructured local authorities were established in England in 1974 (Cullingworth and Nadin, 1994). In 1990, local government reform was also on the agenda through the announcement of the process of establishing unitary councils in the UK at the same time.

A further period of local government reform was commenced in the Local Government Act 2000 and completed in the 2011 Localism Act. This provided local authorities with a general power of competence, and both legislative changes were enacted in first terms of government. The associated planning reform of 2004, set out in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act to establish more integrated spatial planning was again based on the structural reform of local authority powers and responsibilities. In two key steps in 2000 and 2011, local authorities have a general power of competence and are able to act independently of government on finance and other issues. The planning system is an essential means for local authorities to deliver their priorities using powers provided to raise and use capital funding (Morphet, 2011).

### **3. Planning Pivots as Policy Punctuations**

Although both planning and local government reform are constantly on national and local political agendas it is now important to consider 'why their time had come' (Kingdon, 2003, 1) to be included in the policy agendas of central government. In considering their appearance on the policy agenda using the extended list of

factors identified earlier, why were these moments chosen to promote changes in legislation and system structure? Firstly taking the internal factors, were these agenda setting episodes ideological in their impulse? The 1947, 1968 and 2004 reforms were implemented by the Labour Party and those in 1989-91 by the Conservative Party which, despite a move to reduce the role of planning policy as a prevailing element in determining planning applications, returned to a plan led system in 1990. The Labour Government both implemented certainty in 1947 and removed it in 1968. The Coalition Government have returned some kind of certainty through the 2011 Localism Act. Planning applications will now be determined by the policy set out in the adopted local plan. Where there is no adopted local plan, planning applications may be determined on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate which has been integrated into Central Government in 2012. In these cases, deemed consent regimes may apply through a presumption in favour of the development. The role of ideology in planning reform appears to be more rhetorical than practical.

There is little evidence that the propulsion towards planning policy reform came from competing interests despite John and Bevan's (2012) assertion that 1990 reforms were due to the rise the Green Party. The role of the public in taking an anti-planning stance has grown through the period. Although this was widely seen to be a key factor in promoting the expected abandonment of local plans following the 2010 general election, the Localism Act 2011 and the National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG, 2012) have reinforced the 2004 system. The level of government interest in planning policy is hardly evidence of a policy malaise or need to catch up (O'Donnell, 2012).

This leaves three key factors which might be worth exploring in more detail - the external impetus for policy agenda prioritisation, the role of policy punctuations as a technology of change and thirdly whether there was some commitment to change that was being met through an agreed programme. Firstly, in considering exogenous factors, in 1947 the UK was preparing to meet its post-war commitments to reducing its debt and reconstructing the country. The development of planning legislation that created a national framework for development through the New Towns Act 1946 and protection through the National Parks Act 1949 established an overarching framework for local planning policy which was set out in the 1947

Town and Country Planning Act. Here external economic factors and meeting the post-war covenant made during the war were uppermost.

Moving to 1968, the UK was preparing to enter the EU which implied the adoption of the *acquis communautaire*. Although town planning was not on the agenda, the agreement to pool member states' responsibilities for environmental regulation in the EU was included in the Treaty of Rome 1957. As part of the Danish entry negotiations in 1972, this role started to be extended. Before this, the Nordic Council, comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden had already developed a common position on environmental standards. These standards were higher than those in other parts of the world (Jordan and et al, 2003). In negotiating membership of the EU, Scandinavian countries were concerned that they would be required to lower these environmental standards. The pressure to introduce environmental issues into the trade agenda of the EU also came after the Stockholm Conference in 1972. Up to this point, few environmental actions had been taken (Leontitsis, 2011) but subsequently member states increased their own environmental regulation. Thus although the UK's interest in joining the EU was primarily for trade and economic reasons, they were also aware of the parallel environmental agenda. Further the work of the UK on conservation demonstrated through the 1967 Civic amenities Act and the 1968 Countryside Act was also seen as being part of this wider environmental movement.

The third burst of legislative activity can be seen in the period after the adoption of the Single European Act (1986) which included the environment within the mainstream for the first time and shifted the ability to act on environmental policy at EU level from unanimity to majority voting. As Haigh (1996) states, this shift was unexpected and there was a low level of preparation in the both the British delegation and subsequently in government. The changes in legislation from 1990 includes transposition of new environmental requirements that followed including the Environmental Impact Assessment 1985, and Environmental Protection Act 1990 both of which had significant impacts on planning policy and decision making. The requirement for universal applicability of local plans and a plan led system could be said be a response to the application of more regulated approaches and at the same time there was an expectation that environmental assessment would be extended to plans, policies and programmes, as it was in 2001.

The policy impetus in the period 2000-2004 reflects the changes agreed through the Maastricht Treaty (1992) that extended the subsidiarity protocol from environment to wider policy areas - a process that was fully completed in the Lisbon Treaty in 2009. The application of the subsidiarity protocol was the underlying driver for local government reform and the application of the policy of localism. The changes in the planning system in the UK, to integrate it further with local government, have also been apparent in other member states including Sweden (Sehested, 2009) and France (Booth, 2009).

Although these factors can contribute to the exogenous influences on UK policy agendas, there are also issues of the use of the factor of the programmatic approach. When policy issues are agreed in the EU, these agreements extend to their implementation within set time frames. As indicated earlier the role of timing then takes on an institutional quality (Goetz and Mayer-Sahling, 2012). Although the development of EU frames for local planning policy have not been developed, the consequences of the implementation of the protocols of subsidiarity and the more recently of territorial cohesion as well as the growing role of environmental legislation have both bounded the spaces and influenced the temporality of planning reform programmes. Further, research has demonstrated that the application of EU legislation in member states has become more administrative than political (Heritier, 2001).

#### **4. Does punctuated equilibrium offer any theoretical insights?**

This paper posed the initial question of whether 2004 and 2011 can be seen as policy punctuations or whether they could be viewed as part of the incremental change that is experienced between punctuations. Despite the rhetoric of reform and change both before the general election (Conservative Party, 2009; 2010) and subsequently (Osborne, 2012), in practice the planning system implemented in 2004 remains intact. The removal of the RSS policy can in some ways be replaced by the new national planning policy for key infrastructure which takes legal precedence in any planning decision and policy making. So although the components have changed from regional to national the effect on the system remains the same.

So there is an argument that suggests that whilst 2004 is policy punctuation, 2011 is not. However if punctuated equilibrium is used as predictive theory and there is some evidence of second termism in the development of planning legislation together with its links to local government reform, does this suggest that the next planning reforms will be in the next period of Parliament, expected to be from 2015? However, if the Coalition does not win a second term would this push back the reform of planning (and perhaps local government) to the following electoral cycle or is there enough expectation to an agenda being developed now? One factor to consider in the future is that local government is now in charge of its own future to a greater extent so that pressures and nudges from central government for local authorities to join up or share functions may or may not be successful. Experience of working together in FEAS may lead local authorities to follow the experience of Manchester and Leeds to become combined authorities. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland there are government calls to reduce the number of local authorities and here England may once again follow the example set there as in 1996. If local government is to change what difference would this make to the planning system? What further changes or switches might be expected? Experience of all these policy punctuations demonstrate that change takes some time to implement and the periods of 10-12 years seem to be the most likely for development plan renewal based on past experience. Will the periodisation of the implementation of EU policy have any role?

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