

# Sustainable city-building and the new politics of the possible: reflections on the governance of the London Olympics 2012

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*This paper draws on the example of the London Olympics 2012 to argue that a new 'realistic' politics of good governance and output-focused private sector delivery now dominates sustainability policy thinking. It is a politics that makes a series of normative claims and promises based on a pragmatic and non-ideological approach to sustainability. Its advocates claim that it converts the lofty ideals and aspirations of utopian sustainability into tangible, verifiable and output-based delivery mechanisms. The discussion examines the governance arrangements that were put in place for the Games and the ways in which sustainability objectives were defined, institutionalised and mobilised by hybrid public and private actors. It outlines some of the wider impacts of this new development model and its implications for thinking about sustainability planning elsewhere.*

**Key words:** *sustainability, managerialism, London Olympics, privatisation, governance models, urban democracy*

## Introduction

This paper explores contemporary changes to governance ideologies in cities such as London and the extent to which a new model of sustainability planning is emerging. It uses the specific example of the London Olympic Games 2012 to argue that new output-centred systems of governance are emerging that focus on contract-based forms of delivery undertaken by an elite group of 'expert' companies who possess the necessary capacities to oversee increasingly complex and expensive development processes. The paper discusses four principal components to these new models: (i) the belief that sustainability projects can be *compartmentalised* into a series of definable tasks whose inputs and outcomes can be measured and calculated; (ii) that elite project *managers*, drawn principally from the private sector, can be given the responsibility to 'govern' all aspects of projects; (iii) that an intricate and judicialised set of contractual

agreements can be used to oversee development processes and frame qualitative, as well as quantitative, dimensions of sustainability; and (iv) that democratic engagement becomes characterised as a disruptive 'risk factor' that can be isolated and managed by dedicated experts. In short, it claims that we are witnessing the rolling out a *politics of the possible* that in Jacques Rancière's terms is characterised by a 'strange mixture of realism and utopia' (2005, 8). Thus, while this approach to sustainability and development planning appears to focus on what is 'realistic' and 'achievable' in very limited terms, it is also underpinned by a utopian belief that there are no 'wicked problems' that are beyond managerial solutions. The paper considers the implications of this model for broader understandings of state practices and the interactions between private and public sector actors. It begins by exploring the growth of managerial modes of 'realistic' governance before turning to the London Olympics example. It examines the ways in which a process-based London governance model of how 'to do' sustainability planning is now being mobilised and rolled out by public and private actors working across a variety of scales.

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## Building sustainable cities and the new politics of the possible

The discourse of sustainability has always been premised on a utopian view of governance in which power would be transferred from remote hierarchical state bureaucracies to more flexible, citizen-led arrangements. State bodies would become enablers, rather than managers, and would oversee a process of democratisation and devolution. This so-called 'good governance' model now permeates development thinking and governance reform across the world and forms the backdrop to the work of supranational organisations such as the United Nations and World Bank (see UNESCAP no date). Since the late 1970s it has found expression in a wide range of international programmes and agendas. Earlier attempts to promote ecological modernisation and environmental protection have evolved into wider concerns with sustainable community-building and localism (see Colantonio and Dixon 2011). Since the financial crisis of 2008, governments have been even more willing to promote state reform and have used sustainability discourses to legitimate wide-ranging institutional changes. The UK government, for example, now promotes it as a 'golden thread' that weaves together policy thinking and planning practice (DCLG 2011). Other governments, the European Union and World Bank still see sustainability and sustainability practices as integral to their developmental models and thinking about urban planning.

And yet, the form and character of sustainability governance has been subject to a relentless and under-discussed, evolution. This has been fuelled by a growing frustration with the perceived inability of sustainability programmes to deliver measurable outcomes and a concern that too much engagement and empowerment acts as an unnecessary brake on development practices. It is commonly argued that the application of 'realistic' management principles and the implementation of delivery-focused governance arrangements have been impeded by a utopian focus on equity and all-encompassing participation. Concerns with equity and rights are increasingly dismissed as 'old-fashioned' and an impediment to the business of getting things done. For Rancière (2005) these new agendas reflect and reproduce a wider shift towards 'realism' in policy thinking and a wider anti-utopianism in which political idealism is equated with governance failures and the constraints of top-down control. The net result is that

we no longer believe in promises. We have become realists. Or, in any case, our governments and wise experts have become realists for us. They stick to the 'possible', which precisely does not offer a great deal of possibilities.

This 'possible' is made of small things that progress slowly if they are handled with caution by those who know. (2005, 9)

The outcome, as Rancière notes, is that as citizens we are implored to be realistic and our expectations are to be managed because 'the realism which pretends to liberate us from utopia and its evil spells is itself still a utopia. It promises less, it's true, but it does not promise otherwise' (2005, 11). The radical possibilities opened up by sustainability thinking become limited by a 'submission to the law of the present and the merely possible' (2005, 10; see also Swyngedouw 2009a 2009b; Žižek 2011 2012).

Such trends are particularly salient in relation to sustainability thinking. The language of 'possibilism' and 'outputs' dominates contemporary understandings of the term. Perhaps most significantly this politics of realism itself has evolved and expanded. Policymakers and the elite private experts that they contract to deliver programmes increasingly believe in their own utopia; that is a managerial form of governance that 'works' and can be made to work in a growing range of governmental fields. The paradox is that in some ways these imaginations promise too much, rather than 'very little' (cf. Rancière 2005). It is an ideology that sets no imagined limit on the ability of managerialism to frame qualitative, as well as quantitative, dimensions of sustainability thinking and practice. It represents a foundational challenge to how modern cities are governed and to the form and character of state activities.

There are four principal elements to these new models of sustainability governance:

- 1 *The compartmentalisation of policy problems and solutions*: Sustainability practices have traditionally been elided with a belief in the power of holistic and integrated planning. However, this is now being replaced by a new set of logics that call for governance processes to be *compartmentalised* and broken down into a series of definable, managerial tasks whose inputs and outcomes can be measured and calculated (see Raco *et al.* 2013). The emphasis is on encouraging dis-connected ways of thinking that make sustainability planning 'realistic' and 'do-able' rather than holistic, aspirational and idealist. It is a model of policy practice that lends itself to simple transferability across different topographies and scales. The implementation of managerialism, it is imagined, can convert the messiness of places into organised, efficient and more sustainable spaces.
- 2 *A utopian faith in project management*: Underpinning this shift in emphasis is a growing orthodoxy; that project managers drawn from the private sector possess the necessary skills and competencies to govern in ways that go beyond the capacities of politicians,

bureaucrats and even active citizens. For Offe, this represents a 'state-organised unburdening of the state' in which 'auxiliary forces within civil society according to their specific competences and resources' (2009, 552). In theory there are few limits to this governance model. In normative terms it is argued that project managers should be given the freedom to undertake task-based projects as they see fit. The role of the state becomes one of organising project aims and objectives and funding private actors to undertake these tasks. It is a faith that extends way beyond sustainability planning. For if the principle is accepted that project managers can undertake tasks in a more efficient and output-centred manner than state bodies, then there is no reason why most, if not all, fields of state practice should not be subject to the same private-led managerialism. Moreover, it also means that the devolution of responsibilities from state bureaucracies increasingly involves the empowerment not of citizens and communities but of private sector experts who are able to take advantage of new business opportunities and govern sustainability on behalf of others.

3 *A new contractualism*: In order to implement compartmentalised, project-management driven governance reforms, a robust system of contractualism is required. Within this new politics of realism there is no real limit to the tasks that can be subjected to contractual rationalities and converted into output-centred forms of practice. Indeed, as noted above, to recognise that such modes of governance have limits would represent an admission that there are factors that cannot be managed and controlled. Legal constructs, such as 'contracts', represent a particular form of technology for overcoming disputes and framing ways of thinking and acting so that

the character of the tools matters: technologies come into being in order to overcome the political and epistemological limits of existing knowledge and hence these technologies are best understood quite literally as *politics by other means*. (Riles 2005, 986; emphasis added)

And the rise of contractualism has gone hand-in-hand with the expansion of private elites who not only fight to obtain state-funded contracts to deliver policy programmes but also gain from giving advice, providing private finance and drawing up the complex and legally-binding sets of arrangements that underpin projects (see Murphy 2011). Some of the biggest and most powerful firms in the world now include business service providers and accountants such as Ernst & Young, PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG and Deloitte, who not only advise governments and state bodies on how to establish sustainability agendas but also oversee

contract-based forms of privatisation and policy implementation. Such firms represent the tip of a corporate iceberg that has grown inexorably to fill the governance spaces opened-up by 'good governance' reforms, sustainability regulations and the retreat of government-provided services.

4 *Democratic engagement and disruptions*: The managerial models outlined above imagine that democratic engagement, as with all aspects of governance, can be isolated and managed by project managers in ways that encourage participation and help facilitate development outcomes. For private operators, democratic engagement represents a moment of disruption that can interfere with their expert-driven, compartmentalised project management programmes. Managerialism calls for greater recognition that 'good solutions can be recognised by the fact that they didn't have to be chosen but rather follow from a knowledge of the objective state of things; which is a matter for expert knowledge, not for free choice' (Rancière 2005, 142). This reliance on experts has other effects on decisionmaking. In order to influence policy interventions, citizens and civil society groups have to adopt managerial discourses and ways of working to be seen as legitimate voices. Increasingly, citizens have to look to judicial processes and technical arguments to challenge projects and policy programmes that are being implemented in the name of sustainability, rather than going through formal participatory democratic channels. As Rios-Figueroa and Taylor note, this represents a form of *judicialisation* or 'the increasing use of courts is changing how political actors fight to achieve their policy objectives and the kinds of public justifications used to defend policy reform' (2006, 740). Participation within such models represents the right to have access to legal processes and to develop alternative interventions that are only responsible and recognisable if they conform to managerial models.

The remainder of the paper now turns to the London Olympics 2012 in order to look at how sustainability thinking is being converted into an aggressively managerial form of delivery-based governance. The discussion draws on on-going research on the contracts surrounding the Games and the regulatory structures established to support development. While the Olympics can, in some senses, be seen as a relatively 'unique' event, the paper argues that in practice it both reflects and reproduces wider changes in the governance of sustainability planning in cities. A concern with sustainability became a dominant framework around which a series of wider objectives and governance practices surrounding the Games were framed. Sustainability obligations were converted into contractual commitments and reporting

mechanisms to ensure efficient and effective project delivery. The London Olympics appears to offer a governance solution to the potentially destabilising disruptions caused by complex democratic demands. More significantly it increasingly acts as a normative model for how sustainability principles *should* be governed and managed elsewhere and in this sense the case study has a symbolic and political importance that goes beyond the event itself. Elite private companies and governments now see the London Olympic model as a valuable template for the implementation of effective sustainability governance.

## A sustainable London Olympics?

From the outset the organisers of the London Olympic Games 2012 promoted the event as a showcase for new forms of effective, engaged and efficient sustainability planning. The London bid claimed that it would create the 'greenest' Games ever and act as a global role model for urban development projects and sustainability strategies. These promises, however, created a real challenge for local managers and politicians. The selected Olympic site represented a complex development space characterised by residential and business communities and a fragmented post-industrial physical environment (see Poynter 2009). The proposed governance solution was to implement a private sector-led, contract-based delivery model that would convert sustainability objectives into a series of definable, bounded and compartmentalised problems to be tackled through targeted interventions. Selected private sector expertise would be identified and mobilised within a powerful project management structure. Devolution in this context meant the handing over of powers and responsibilities to private actors under contract who could then undertake the tasks of development, it is claimed, better than state bodies could do themselves.

The first step was to establish a dedicated Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) less than a year after the Games was awarded to London. The ODA was staffed with experts drawn from public and private sectors and its role was to manage a

portfolio of Projects and activities that are required for the delivery of venues, facilities, infrastructure and transport on time for the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games that are fit-for-purpose, in a way that maximises the delivery of a sustainable legacy within the available budget. (ODA 2011, 6)

The ODA was a quango body, working at arms-length from government. This, it was claimed, would give it sufficient independence and insulation from shifting democratic demands in the city and allow it to focus on its core objective – that of project delivery.

The de-coupling of policy implementation from democratic debates within London was further entrenched by the appointment, by the ODA, of a private sector delivery manager. Under a detailed contract a multinational conglomerate named CLM<sup>1</sup> was hired and charged significant fees of over £700 million to oversee the delivery and management of the Games' infrastructure. Its employment constituted a large-scale privatisation of the governance process and the institutionalisation of managerial modes of sustainability governance (see Raco 2013 2014).

Working in partnership, CLM and the ODA introduced a delivery model based on top-down project compartmentalisation and management. They established a work package-based contractual structure in which major development contracts were bundled together and awarded to major, global contractors. These firms would take responsibility for large projects, such as the construction of the Olympic stadium, and for sub-contracting work out to smaller contractors. Over 43 000 contracts were signed and managed under this arrangement (DCMS 2010). Rather than focusing on lofty aspirations and wider conceptual imaginations of sustainability, the objective was to establish clear, rational and output-centred practices that would make sustainability 'possible'. These would be embedded in concrete contractual compliance requirements. Each work package signatory had to produce a sustainability action plan that, in the words of one major contractor, 'consolidated all sustainability targets and provided the impetus for each specialised manager to enhance performance' (Maier 2012, 1). Or as noted by another, it was critical to 'integrate explicit sustainability targets early on in projects . . . and to make sustainability simple, to translate high level objectives into work package specifics in order to engender ownership of sustainability' (Henson 2012, 1). This process of conversion is very much under the control of experts who claim to understand what is 'possible' and what can be 'realistically' delivered and achieved. It is explicitly designed to implement a particular mode of thinking about governance and sustainability in the place of alternative and/or more plural imaginations.

In order to provide a frame for private intervention, a list of sustainability targets was drawn up and integrated into an ambitious and wide-ranging sustainable development strategy (SDS; ODA 2006). The SDS was designed to establish a management framework and to embed sustainability principles directly into all stages of the contract-writing process. Twelve 'objective areas' were set out (see Table 1) that covered a bold range of policy fields. The breadth of these objectives indicates some ambivalence in the governance model. On the one hand, they promote a sense of holistic integration by covering everything from social inclusion and the aim to 'involve, communicate,

**Table 1** The ODA's sustainability objectives

Core objective	Secondary objective(s)
Carbon	To minimise the carbon emissions associated with the Olympic Park and venues
Water	To optimise the opportunities for efficient water use, reuse and recycling
Waste	To optimise the reduction of waste through design; maximise reuse and recycling of materials
Materials	To identify, source and use environmentally friendly and socially responsible materials
Biodiversity and ecology	To protect and enhance biodiversity and ecology in the Lower Lea valley and other venues
Land, water, noise, air	To optimise positive and minimise adverse impacts on land, water, noise and air quality
Supporting communities	To create new safe mixed-use public space
Transport and mobility	To prioritise walking, cycling and the use of public transport to and within the Olympic Park venues
Access	To create a high-accessible Olympic Park and venues through inclusive design
Employment and business	To create new employment and business opportunities locally, regionally and nationally
Health and well-being	To provide for healthy lifestyle opportunities during the construction of and in the design of the Olympic Park and venues
Inclusion	To involve, communicate and consult effectively with stakeholders and the diverse communities surrounding the Olympic Park and venues

Source: ODA (2006, 10)

and consult effectively' (2006, 10) with local communities, to carbon reduction, a concern with biodiversity and the reduction of waste. In this way they reflect broader conceptions of sustainably community-building that have permeated planning discourses across the EU during the 2000s.

On the other hand, they are framed in such a way that they compartmentalise and break down the governance processes into a series of clearly defined management tasks and outcomes. They convert sustainability into a technical, management-led programme of activities. As the SDS states, 'the ODA recognises that advancing these objectives requires a robust management approach, with sustainability and value for money being core components of decision-making' (ODA 2006, 11). It outlines a vision of project-led, output-driven governance that seeks to shape conduct and ways of thinking through the whole supply chain:

the management of sustainability requires it to be integrated into project procurement policies, project requirements, project definitions, and specific contracts across the programme. The sustainable development outcome sought will largely be determined by literally thousands of programme execution decisions by the many people and organisations involved. (2006, 11)

The explicit focus on sustainability delivery through management is embedded in the ODA's desire to establish a 'triple bottom line of successful outcomes for the environment, the economy, and society' (2006, 11).

Moreover, the SDS could 'act as a catalyst for industry to deliver an improvement in the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of development across the

UK' (p 4) and this, in turn, was part of a wider 'desire to improve standards within the construction industry and sustainable development' (p 58). Compartmentalised, 'bespoke assessments' were to be used in which sustainability measures for contracts would be expanded to 'incorporate social aspects of sustainability traditionally not considered' in governance arrangements. The keys to management would be through 'procurement', 'assurance', 'stakeholder engagement' (meaning contractors) and 'communications'.

Much of the responsibility for ensuring that sustainability objectives were delivered was, therefore, handed over to CLM. They were required to establish binding and achievable sustainability measures and targets in their sub-contracts and to ensure that all firms were 'compliant' with these contractual requirements. The decision to employ a private sector delivery manager is now presented as an important 'lesson' for sustainability planning elsewhere because it enabled ODA 'to make use of a delivery partner with the right skills and experience to mobilise quickly and focus on delivering the project . . . tapping into the contractors' established supply chains' (Wright *et al.* 2011, 3). The emphasis is increasingly on 'established' and 'quality' contractors with proven track-records of project delivery, a trend that inevitably leads to a filtering process in which those companies with high levels of reputational capital increasingly monopolise available spending. It is in their interests to make the procurement and regulatory process around the delivery of sustainable projects as complex and expensive as possible, because this reinforces their market dominance. It is a form of monopolisation through privatisation (see Crouch 2011). Moreover, by ensuring that priority theme



targets surrounding sustainability were built into contracts, the 'ODA ensured its aspirations were aligned with those of the supply chain' (Wright *et al.* 2011, 3).

As the ODA notes in its reflections on the sustainability impacts of the Olympics, its 'approach to innovation and sustainable development has influenced long-term change in the industry and left a lasting legacy' (2011, 9). Sustainability planning thus became 'embedded . . . into procurement processes' (2011, 1), with sustainability managers employed to implement strong audit procedures and ways of working. By managing processes in an aggressive way, 'suppliers understood that in order to win business they would have to demonstrate the sustainability benefits of their products, as well as the sustainability credentials of their companies' (2011, 5).

Perhaps most significantly the model also allows private sector experts to influence sustainability strategies and programmes. Companies such as Mace took a leading role in establishing new sustainability criteria in their own construction practices (particularly around the sustainable sourcing of materials) and these measures were then adopted by CLM and the ODA and rolled out across the Olympic project as a form of best practice. For such firms the Games not only provides an avenue for their expertise to become embedded in policy practices, but also limits future market competition as only a relatively small number of firms are able to meet the new 'quality' requirements that they helped to implement. This reflects a wider trend in contemporary governance in which what Claire Cutler (2010) terms 'private international regimes' increasingly shape policy agendas at all levels. She describes a context in which expert advice and private sector ways of working become converted into managerial frameworks that are then adopted by state bodies and emerge as new 'regulatory requirements'. In this way experts are able to feed their knowledge directly into decisionmaking in the name of quality delivery, while de facto marginalising the voices of those who have alternative or different forms of knowledge.

This 'model' of how to develop projects in a 'sustainable' manner has been rapidly taken up by professional bodies and government agencies at a variety of scales. The perceived 'success' of the Games is being used by the UK government, global companies and professional bodies to demonstrate how this form of sustainability planning 'works', even in complex development spaces. There has been a conscious attempt to diffuse the model to other places and other projects. The UK Green Building Council (2012), for example, has established a series of lessons that it declares are 'transferable to all construction projects', regardless of size or local context. The ODA has launched a Learning Legacy Agenda in which its 'successes' in relation to sustainability planning, engineering and construction feature prominently. The London model

has been taken up by the UK's Foreign Office and Trade and Industry Council as an example of what is good about doing business in the UK. The emphasis is on the relationships between governance and economic efficiency in an attempt to boost the UK's attractiveness to foreign direct investment. The message is clear. It is possible to have both efficiency and effectiveness in public policy. Projects such as the Olympics show that the objectives of competitiveness and environmental improvements can go hand in hand, if the governance arrangements are put in place to facilitate this. And as noted earlier, global construction and development firms are now using the Games as a showcase for their own skills and ways of working 'with' sustainability regulations.

However, there are other significant lessons that also emerge from the London example. This type of sustainability planning is relatively expensive and diverts state resources away from other fields of welfare intervention. The Olympics had an official cost approaching £10 billion (US\$14 billion), in large part because it is costly to hire private experts and the whole process of drawing up and managing contracts is a resource-intensive activity. Most significantly it involves the transfer of large funds from public budgets to private recipients. Rather than filling a funding 'gap', the involvement of private experts helps to create such 'gaps' because budgets are inflated to meet corporate demands. Business elites and financial investors have realised that there are relatively low risk but high returns to be made from the implementation of policy programmes related to sustainability. The push for 'good governance' is being used to promote new investment opportunities in the governance and management of cities. Big firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, for instance, are already expanding into the emerging fields of resilience planning for sustainability in part, because this represents a growth area that is ripe for expert involvement (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2012). The compartmentalised nature of governance arrangements, so prevalent in the London Olympic model, can also have the effect of turning policy thinking inwards, to specific nodes, sites and territories. It eschews relational thinking and promotes an incremental, case-by-case approach out of which more 'sustainable' outcomes will emerge.

These processes have significant democratic implications. As politicians hand over responsibilities to contracted-out third parties, it can become more difficult to identify who takes decisions and with what effects. Civil society groups face new challenges as they have to work their way through relatively opaque managerial power relations and institutional practices. Political legitimacy may also be harder to obtain for critical groups as, in the words of Rancière, the discourse of 'reasonable management' seeks to 'reduce democratic forms to the reputedly univocal management of common economic

interests' (2006, 76). This consensual univocalism is difficult to challenge because alternative approaches are presented as standing in the way of wider progress and delivery in the name of vested interests that run against a common good. If politics is simplified so that it becomes a technical matter concerned with how delivery can be improved and made more efficient, then the grounds for articulating alternatives becomes increasingly limited.

However, such an approach assumes that groups and citizens are unable to politicise and challenge models that seek to pigeon-hole and limit the acceptable boundaries of democratic participation. In practice, citizens may be able to develop different paths of resistance. For example, the strategic use of institutional tools, such as judicial reviews, may enable groups to prevent projects going ahead or to challenge and amend policy agendas. There is already evidence of this 'judicialisation' of public policy taking place in some cities where citizens and even some actors within different branches of the state, challenge policy decisions and the actions of private companies. Imrie and Dalton (2014), for example, highlight how the mobilisation of legal reviews prevented the development of new sustainable communities by the Tesco Corporation in London. The company failed to apply 'due process' to its planning application and the plans were subsequently thrown out by the Planning Inspectorate. Alternatively, it may be possible to weave more progressive objectives directly into the fabric of contracts in response to political pressure and to use contracts and legal regulations to hold the powerful to account. Of course, the danger with adopting such approaches is that of indirectly legitimising the managerial models of governance that they seek to challenge and pose significant problems that may limit the possibilities of engagement, particularly for poorly resourced groups. Whatever modes of engagement prove to be more or less effective, the managerialisation of sustainability governance and development will create new challenges and require new tactics and strategies of political engagement. Citizens will be faced with difficult questions over how best and at what point in the policy process to challenge proposals.

## Conclusions

This paper has used the example of the London Olympics 2012 to explore wider changes in the governance of urban sustainability. It has argued that the Games reflects and reproduces a new private-led, managerial thinking that seeks to compartmentalise and contractualise governance arrangements and focus on what is realistic and do-able, as opposed to what is idealistic or radical. On a broader canvass, the criticism that 'realistic' attitudes towards policymaking offer 'very little' (cf. Ranci re 2005)

underpins much of the recent critical writing on output-focused managerial governance. This paper has argued, however, that the true danger within such discourses lies not in their closing down of possibilities but in their utopian optimism and their in-built expansionism. Managerial models, advocates claim, can be used to implement a whole suite of sustainability objectives and rather than promising very little they, in many ways, promise too much. There are no perceived limits to what managerial expertise can do, if it is channelled and mobilised in the right way by policymakers who 'understand' how governance works. If the 'right' experts can be mobilised and drawn in to the policy process then governments will be able to demonstrate, in visible terms, how effective and private sector-like they can be.

There is a tendency within such models to focus on quality producers and those with proven track-records of delivery. There is less focus on traditional aspects of sustainability thinking around participation and holistic planning, both of which are over-concerned, it is argued, with policy inputs. By privileging these inputs over outputs, democratic models are portrayed as being 'unrealistic' and ineffective when compared with project management. They are contrasted with dominant understandings of good governance that focus on getting things done. Engagement, perhaps paradoxically, becomes viewed as the enemy of effective delivery. By trying to interfere too much, democratic agents only succeed in creating disruptions that make policy interventions less sustainable.

The implications of this way of thinking are, of course, potentially enormous for urban politics and the building of just and sustainable cities. It represents a powerful challenge to accepted understandings within academic writing on the value of democratic participation and it is therefore incumbent on researchers to highlight the true costs of such models in political as well as financial terms. The devolution of hierarchical state powers to a range of actors may well be occurring in many cities in the name of more sustainable forms of planning and progressive politics. But those taking up these responsibilities are often to be found in an expanding private sector that is better placed to 'deliver' defined sustainability outcomes than citizen or voluntary and community groups. In Richard Murphy's terms, such firms increasingly use sustainability discourses to secure

irrevocable contractual claims over taxation revenues that they will manage henceforth in their own private companies which they claim will undertake the tasks of the state so much better than the state could do itself. (2011, 30)

As this paper has argued, such outcomes represent a logical outcome of contemporary trends in sustainability

discourses in which the interests of state actors, investors and elite private corporations have become melded into a powerful new alloy of managerialism.

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### Note

1 The special conglomerate consisted of the multinational firms CH2MHill, Laing O'Rourke and Mace. CLM dissolved in 2012 once the infrastructure had been delivered.

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