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Making modern planners: culture change, identity regulation and planning reform

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Abstract

Since 2001 the English planning system, has been subject to a complex series of reforms designed to "modernise" its workings. Central to this has been calls for a "culture change", focusing on professional planners in the public sector. The discourse of culture change is rooted in the managerialist thinking that has been central to long-term processes of state restructuring. du Gay (1996) describes this as an "identity project", designed to change the identities of public servants. This article therefore explores the modernisation of planning through the experiences of public sector planners seeking to negotiate their identities within this change environment.

Key words:

Planning reform, culture change, planners' identities, identity regulation, identity work.

Introduction

Since 2001, the New Labour government has introduced what it has hailed as a "fundamental change" through its "modernising planning" agenda in England (DTLR, 2001). This has entailed a process of concerted change to the formal structures of the planning system (HMSO, 2004). A series of accompanying initiatives, and reviews have also led to wholesale revision of national policy guidance, creating the impression of a policy sphere in flux (for further details see CLG, 2008). These reforms have been hailed as necessary to enable the emergence of an entirely new, *spatial planning* practice capable of playing an enhanced role within emerging forms of local governance (e.g. ibid; Morphet, 2007). One central plank of the

modernisation agenda has been a call for a parallel process of "culture change" amongst all users of the planning system, but with a particular focus on public sector planners.

The discourse of culture change is rooted in the managerialist thinking that has underlain successive governments' attempts to restructure the public sector. Within organisational sociology processes of culture change have come to be associated with "identity regulation", a form of organisational control concerned with regulating employees "insides" (Alvesson and Wilmott, 2002). The article seeks to explore these themes in relation to planning reform. It presents a brief analysis of the uncertain forms of identity regulation that the modernisation of planning has suggested. It then goes on, through two vignettes taken from interviews with local authority policy planners in the South-East of England, to illustrate some of the kinds of "identity work" that this agenda has led planners to engage in. These vignettes help us to consider some of the ways in which planners have understood and coped with the exhortation to remake their practices, and their selves. Overall, it is argued that national level debate about the future of planning could benefit from a greater attentiveness to the lived experiences of planning reform, and an enhanced understanding of the complexity of efforts to remake planners' identities. As a result, it is suggested that planning theory, and British-based planning research in particular, can learn a great deal from instances of "identity work" conceived, following John Forester (1999), as a particular sub-genre of "practice story".

Planning reform: modernising planning cultures

Drawing on thinking from currents in European planning thought, the concept of spatial planning was intended to re-invent English planning, moving beyond the overly narrow and regulatory practice that had become established in the 1990s (Nadin, 2006). The shift to a spatial planning approach has therefore been advocated by influential voices within the planning policy and professional communities, who have seen it as a potentially empowering agenda. This has included notable support from the planning profession's representative body, the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), whose own proclamation of a "new vision" in 2001 was intended to support the re-invigoration of the profession (RTPI, 2001). This can be understood as an attempt to realign the planning professional project (cf. Larson, 1977) with the opportunity structures created by New Labour's wider project of state modernisation.

As such spatial planning has been articulated as a variant of the shift towards new forms of network governance uncertainly promoted by New Labour since 1997 (Allmendinger, 2006; Newman, 2001). This has entailed the stressing of planning's capacity to play a key role in the local level integration or "joining up" of different policy sectors, promoting new forms of public participation, and focusing on evidence-based policy making to shape sustainable places (compare Cabinet Office (1999) and RTPI (2001) for an idea of the points of intersection between the government's priorities for "modernisation" and the profession's "new vision"). These principles have, in certain respects, intersected with long-standing aspirations for planning (Rydin and Thornley, 2002), including influential calls to adapt to the imperatives of a more collaborative practice (e.g. Healey, 1997).

In order to take advantage of these new opportunities both the government and profession have called for the planning community to embrace the need for "culture change" (Shaw, 2006):

> *Culture change permeates every single aspect of our approach to planning reform. We have to reform the way we go about planning as well as reforming the system itself. Planning is a vehicle which cannot be fixed only by looking at its engine. You need to change the way the machine is driven.* (McNulty, 2003)

Government has described the culture change agenda in planning as having various combinations of "key strands" generally entailing: providing a vision and purpose for planning; improving skills and attitudes; raising the profile and improving the image of planning; and ensuring all stakeholders are able to engage with the system (see Ash, 2002; ODPM, 2002; ODPM, 2004). This has been recognized as an agenda requiring the cooperation of all actors in the planning process, and has received widespread support (see e.g. NPF, 2008). However, as the idea of "changing the way the machine is driven" implies, there has been a particular focus on professional planners, and especially those in local authorities (the government's (ODPM, 2004) "Changing the Culture" supplement to Planning magazine, for example, only makes reference to public sector planning).

Ministers have presented the idea of a culture change as an empowering agenda for planners:

> *We want to liberate the profession so that it can focus more on the real*

professional challenges –the substantial, creative and productive work that

makes the difference to the places people live and will live in the future

(Andrews, 2006)

As a discourse, the idea of "culture change" further suggests, however, that the existing culture of planning is a problem and out of step with the attitudes and practices required to make the shift to spatial planning:

It will not be possible to deliver the change that is required without more and

better resources and a different attitude and ways of working amongst those

who operate the system (Ash, 2002)

As such it fits within New Labour's wider project of "modernisation" across the public sector that has been partly founded on similar strategies of problematisation of the status quo (see Finlayson, 2003). Indeed, the discourse of culture change can be understood as a governmental strategy used by New Labour to try and bring about modernising change across the public sector.

Culture change, identity regulation and identity work

The discourse of culture change in planning can be traced to the commitment of successive governments to adapt private-sector managerial practices into the public sector (Finlayson, 2003; Clarke and Newman, 1997; Newman, 2001). Alvesson and Svenningsson (2008) suggest that organisational culture was "discovered" from the late 1970s onwards in a series of texts within the human relations school of management, and came to be thought of as central to organisational success. This

discovery implied recognition of the importance of the "soft" rather than the "hard",

or formal dimensions of engineering change within organisations (Alvesson and

Willmott, 2002). This was founded in part on critiques of bureaucracy as a form of

organisation that stifled the creative capacities of the workforce (du Gay, 1996, 2000).

As a result, the idea of "culture change" came to be associated with the emancipation

of employees, and strategies designed to encourage workers to identify with an

organisation's goals as a whole, rather than the more limited, role defined perspective

produced by bureaucracy (Stokes and Clegg, 2002). Culture therefore came to be seen

as something an organisation *has*, a variable that can be manipulated to regulate the

relationship between organisational goals and the attitudes and dispositions of

workers (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). As such, culture was understood, "*to*

structure the way people think, feel and act in organisations"- in effect the

management of culture came to be understood as a means of governing the identities

of workers (du Gay, 1996a p.151, cf. Rose and Miller, 1992).

Alvesson and Willmott (2002), drawing on the wider salience of questions of identity

within the social sciences (e.g. du Gay et al, 2000), suggest that this has introduced a

pervasive concern for management as a form of "identity regulation". They seek to

augment this perspective, however, by insisting, in keeping with the wider literature

on the complexity of effectively engineering cultural change (Schein, 1992, Alvesson

and Svenningsson, 2008), that such processes cannot be read as a simple process of

top-down regulation. Rather they introduce a further metaphor, "*the employee as*

identity worker who is enjoined to incorporate the new managerial discourses into

narratives of self-identity" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002 p.7). As a result they

suggest that occupational identity is a complex product of processes of negotiation

(identity work) between different forms of identity regulation, and the wide variety of different resources workers draw on in shaping their sense of self (see also Halford and Leonard, 1999). This schema is represented in figure 1, taken from Alvesson and Willmott (2002, p.55), which describes the process of identity formation.

Within the public sector du Gay (1996, 2000) suggests that the extension of this principle of "culture governance" (cf. 6, 1998; Finlayson, 2003; Bang, 2005) into the management of the state can, in part, be understood as an "identity project", designed to change the way in which public servants relate to their roles. This suggests that the culture change agenda in planning should be explored as a form of identity regulation, requiring professional planners to engage in different forms of identity work as they seek to adjust to the imperatives of "modernization".

Planning reform: "making up" modern planners?

In this context Peel and Lloyd's (2007) description of culture change in planning as "*an attempt to engender an ideological transformation in the planning ethos*" takes on a further salience. Calls to embrace this new ideological ethos must, in part, be understood as calls for planners to take up new identities, understanding the purposes of their professional lives in new ways. It is, however, necessary to critically interrogate such calls, and to question the types of identity regulation that they imply.

The roots of the discourse of "culture change" in managerialist ideology, for example, immediately suggest the need for caution. Managerialism has been widely described as heralding "troubled times" for public sector professional groups (Gleeson and Knights, 2005, Clarke et al, 2000), representing a concerted attack on professional

autonomy (Ferlie et al, 1996), and an attempt to engender new forms of control over state agents more generally (Hoggett, 1996). Meanwhile, New Labour's broader project of modernisation, heavily rooted in managerialism (cf. Finlayson, 2003; Newman, 2001), has rested on the problematisation of all resistance to "inevitable" and necessary change as conservative and backward looking (Cochrane, 2004; Taylor-Gooby, 2000). However, as Newman (2001), Finlayson (2003) and others (e.g. Hall, 2003; Clarke, 2004) have shown, the discourse of modernisation has often also served ideological purposes, giving the impression of a coherent reform programme by masking the considerable tensions within New Labour's hybrid ideology and approach to governing.

This has involved an uneven approach to managing public services. At times the government has proclaimed its commitment to a partnership with public servants in developing progressive new forms of governance. At other times, meanwhile, it has apparently understood them as barriers to necessary modernisation, and therefore as objects to be modernised, rather than as agents of change (Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Newman, 2001). This has led to a proliferation of academic interest in understanding the experience of "being modernised/ modernising", and the ways in which public sector professionals and other state agents negotiate their identities within the changing state (e.g. Newman and Nutley, 2003; Newman, 2005; Gleeson and Knights, 2005; Stronach et al, 2002; Hoggett et al, 2006). Such accounts further emphasise the importance of understanding how state agents are both constituted by processes of identity regulation, but also work in turn (through forms of identity work) to populate and thereby constitute the state – suggesting that the state can be understood as a "peopled process" (Jones 2008).

Calls for planners to embrace the opportunities presented by the shift to spatial planning must be understood in this context. Such exhortations have tended to rest on an assumption that the change implied by modernisation is a more or less straightforward step on a path towards progress. However, as Allmendinger (2006, p.142) suggests:

> The evidence for much of the analysis of spatial planning is limited and driven by normative positions: spatial planning is government objective…as well as professional aim…Spatial planning is a panacea for the problems of the past and the goal for the future.

The presence of key tensions within the modernisation agenda for planning, and within the concept of spatial planning itself, has often therefore been underplayed. However, it has been clear throughout the last ten years that New Labour in government has retained an ambivalent attitude towards planning (Allmendinger and Tewdwr-Jones, 2000). And that the government has sought to pursue apparently contradictory goals through their reforms, including promotion of a more holistic and deliberative spatial planning, but also a more neoliberal, "light touch" approach to the regulation of land-use (Inch, 2009). Within this uncomfortably hybrid agenda, planners have been cast as both agents of the shift to spatial planning, but also as barriers to economic productivity and the delivery of new housing, and therefore as objects requiring modernisation.

At times, a certain exasperation has been evident in national level discussions of culture change, focusing on practitioners perceived resistance to change and unwillingness to leave the "comfort zone" of narrow, regulatory land-use planning (e.g. Tewdwr-Jones 2004, Morphet 2005). However, by reading the national level modernisation of planning as traversed by multiple tensions, we open up a rather different view of culture change and the types of identity regulation it has suggested. It is a reading that stresses the ideological indeterminacy of the modernisation agenda, and as such suggests that reform may have imposed a considerable burden of identity work on local authority planners as they seek to make sense of their professional selves. This points towards the need to listen to the experiences of planners seeking to make sense of modernisation, and as a result draws attention to the apparent absence of practitioners' voices within the reform deliberations.

Identity work in planning practice: the case for a theory of listening

Planners' identities have often been an implicit rather than an explicit subject of academic interest (Beauregard, 1998, though see significant UK-based contributions by Thomas and Healey, 1991; Campbell and Marshall, 2000, 2001; Tewdwr-Jones 2001, and U.S-based work by Hoch, 1994; Forester, 1992; 1999. Emerging work within psychoanalytical traditions has also considered identity, e.g. Gunder and Hillier, 2004; Baum, 1996, also Abram, 2004). Existing work usefully stresses the way in which planners are situated within a "web of relations" (Healey, 1997; Tewdwr-Jones 2001), between multiple different and potentially contradictory obligations to which they must be responsive (Campbell and Marshall 2000, 2001). This suggests an inherently "in-between" or ambiguous identity, pulled in different directions by different obligations. It also suggests the complexity of attempts to

regulate planners' identities, where identification with different "obligations" can suggest quite different subject positions for planners. The focus of much research has also, quite rightly, been on the nature of "values in use" as opposed to "espoused values" (cf. Argyris and Schon, 1974), suggesting the "thinking in action" emphasis of much planning research (Schon, 1983). However, given the centrality of fears about professional morale to the culture change agenda in England, the more existential question of how planners manage the distance between espoused values and values in use may be due further academic attention.

The aim of the rest of the article is therefore to outline one means of exploring what can be learnt from the experiences of planners in England as they struggle to negotiate their identities within the complex field of obligations of modernising local governance. In so doing the significance of "identity work", as the moment of mediation between structure (identity regulation) and agency (self-identity) is highlighted. Furthermore, the implications of recognising the state as a "peopled process" (Jones, 2008) are emphasised, suggesting something of the lived experience of "being modernised/ modernising", and of the prospects for spatial planning as the basis for a renewal of the planning professional project.

Two examples of the types of "identity work" that practitioners have been drawn into in adjusting to the changes introduced by the new planning system are therefore explored. To do so I introduce two "reflective practitioners" (Schon, 1983), with each of whom two semi-structured interviews were conducted eight-months apart. These are drawn from doctoral research that has involved interviews with some twenty local authority planners working on writing new style spatial strategies in the South East of

England. The two practitioners I introduce here are not intended to be understood as representative of the wider body of planning professionals. Rather they have been selected to illustrate two somewhat contrasting positions, one of them being resistant to what she understands as a central thrust in the modernisation agenda, the other largely enthusiastic. In addition, they have been chosen because of the clarity of their reflections, and the insights that this affords into some of the processes of identity work that systemic change has entailed.

After briefly introducing Anna and Katie (not their real names), I outline brief vignettes taken from their accounts. Following Gleeson and Knights (2006, 284), these serve to "colour in" significant details of the broader themes of identity regulation and identity work:

> *The use of vignettes provides a form of theoretically grounded critical illumination of "what happens" to people in everyday life as a consequence of policy.*

Such vignettes are, of course, not new to planning research, and can be understood as a sub-genre of the "practice stories" advocated by Forester (1999, undated). In so doing the paper reiterates Forester's claim that such a method can act as a device to sensitize theoretical work to the value of listening to the voices of practitioners.

Such methods have, however, been only sporadically visible in UK planning research (though see Thomas and Healey (1991), or Tewdwr-Jones' (2001) reflections on his own practice). Heather Campbell (2003) for example has drawn attention to a certain

academic disdain for planning practice in the UK. In response to this the work of the so-called "practice movement" (Watson, 2002), seeking to develop a planning theory more closely grounded in practice, may provide a useful counterpoint. Furthermore, however, following Beauregard (1998, 100) the paper suggests that a more explicit focus on how the identity of planners is constructed can add further dimensions to such a project:

> *As theory moves ever closer to action, as practice becomes a theoretical immediacy rather than merely a far-off destination, the identity of planners is increasingly unavoidable. Writing the planner makes planning theory (more) real and further enhances our ability to negotiate theory's enduring dilemmas.*

Negotiating modernisation in a "fussy" planning authority

The first vignette concerns Anna, a senior planning officer when I first meet her, and a principal planning officer eight months later. She is an impressively reflective practitioner, perhaps in part due to having completed a PhD prior to entering practice. Anna is motivated by a strong sense of her personal ethical values, she was previously involved in environmental activism and continues to feel that this provides a framework that guides her work:

> *…I try to do the absolute best I can and I think try to, try not to disadvantage people or particularly the environment in what I do, if that makes sense?*

This gives Anna a sense of feeling "odd" in relation to other planners, who she feels are not so strongly driven by any particular ethico-political values. This was one

dimension of her decision to pursue a research degree, putting off entering the world of practice since she retained serious doubts about it ("at that time I didn't want to go and be a planner because I felt like planners were baddies"). Her decision to finally do so was motivated by several factors, including work-life balance as she brings up a young family, and an acceptance that this was one, albeit imperfect, way to pursue her values.

She therefore describes her career as not quite a vocation, though certainly more than a job. This suggests that she needs to manage a certain distance between the values that motivate her, and those that her job entails. She admits that this is, at times, a struggle, and further suggests that she has been very aware of the pressures to "fit in":

> *It's quite hard to negotiate a position in a team of planners, because I hadn't realised before…that it is extremely hierarchical…And if you do speak out you have to be extremely careful, because you don't want to get sidelined as a kind of nutter.*

Over time she has come to accept the hierarchical implications of working in what she calls a very "bureaucratic" environment, and to cede to the authority of a powerful manager in particular. This means that she accepts in principle the existence of a gap between her "espoused values" and the values she is required to use in meeting the obligations of her job.

Anna very deliberately chose to work for a largely rural district authority whose administrative area is marked by significant landscape designations and she identifies

very strongly with this landscape and its "rural issues". She describes the culture of the LPA as "fussy", but with considerable pride, feeling that a strong, regulatory policy framework has contributed to the conservation of the area, and is the most appropriate means of continuing to do so in the face of significant development pressure.

This pride extends into her feelings about the previous local plan that she was heavily involved in drafting, and feels has done a good job of protecting the area's valuable assets. This appears to reflect a shared culture within the policy team Anna works in, and she identifies this as cascading down from her manager. As a result the new planning system and the shift to spatial planning have met with mixed feelings within the authority. For Anna, certain of the principles of spatial planning are, in theory, good – increased public participation, better integration with other strategies, a more evidence-based planning. However, she remains unconvinced that these are likely to be any more achievable through the new system than the old. Moreover, she confesses that she is suspicious of the government's intentions in pushing for reform, and in particular senses that "fussy" planning has been recast as essentially negative by a government intent on the pursuit of housing growth at the expense of all else:

> *And I think you do need something at the local level to retain robust policies of restraint in areas that need that. And I'm not a sort of completely backward looking person but I think that the countryside and nature conservation are my top priorities…*

> *…*

As I was just saying that [the above] I felt that what I'm saying is not very PC and I know I'd get criticised if I said that in front of someone from the CLG, they'd think I was very archaic and not in line with new government thinking.

Thus Anna feels herself to be out of step with the thrust of government policy, holding to an identity that has been problematised by the new policy framework and may even be under threat. She fears that the new system's attempt to move policy away from the writing of regulatory DC policies, and towards more "positive" planning for areas of change, implies a more permissive planning style. Within the authority Anna confessed that this had produced a culture, led by her manager, of seeking to work "back to the local plan" - performing the new regulations as closely as possible in line with the old system which she and her colleagues continue to identify with.

The impacts of "modernisation" on the capacity to continue to perform a "fussy" local political identity were drawn into particular focus when the authority sought to produce a Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). The SHLAA was introduced, following the revision of policy guidance on planning for housing in late 2006, to provide a new methodology for assessing the availability of land for housing (CLG, 2006; 2007). This followed the Treasury commissioned Barker Review of Housing in 2004 that identified land availability as a key constraint to the delivery of new housing (Barker, 2004). The SHLAA can therefore be understood as a governmental technology designed to embed new, more market responsive and development orientated rationalities into planning for housing (cf. Rose and Miller,

1992; Murdoch and Abram, 2002). As such it can also be seen as a technology designed to engineer the performance of particular identities (cf. Finlayson, 2009).

Due to commitments in their project plan (the Local Development Scheme or LDS) Anna's authority was required to make an early start on the SHLAA with only draft guidance available. Given responsibility for this task, Anna found herself "having quite a battle" with her manager over the best way to approach the work. Having assessed the guidance Anna was aware that the SHLAA required a much more comprehensive assessment of capacity than previously. Her manager, meanwhile, seeking to retain existing policy constraints, wanted to bend the new regime back towards the old type of assessment, only including sites in existing urban areas and not identifying any employment land as suitable for housing. Her rationale for this, and one which Anna sympathised with in principle, was that by identifying sites as having housing potential they would effectively be undermined as employment sites and housing development would become inevitable.

Anna saw this incident as an interesting symbol of her own sometimes unthinkingly obedient approach to central government policy guidance, seeing her manager's frustration at her "what's the word? Submissive" attitude. Whilst sympathetic to the idea of resisting the thrust of the guidance:

> *If we just think central government's way and think about development and releasing land for development and having a lot of you know very modern looking designs then we will lose the real jewels in this county*

She was also nonetheless conscious of the difficulty of "covering up" the fact that the methodology adopted was neither robust, nor in line with government guidance (as would be tested before any strategy could be adopted). Ultimately her manager too came to recognise this, leading to the work needing to be re-done.

Anna's manager's attempt to resist the rationalities imposed by the SHLAA was therefore defeated by the power of the new technology to command a particular performance, and to prohibit others. Anna found herself cast as correct in her obedient, orientation, but also deeply frustrated:

> *I mean it was just ridiculous really, the new agenda was that there are now no constraints, we can't rule things out, land in out in the way we used to... Well, that's not what we kind of believe, certain things like flooding and historical things are actually no-no's but the new thing was you have to look in the settlements and outside.*

Anna's use of "we" in this passage suggests a strong feeling of collective identification with the old ways of working and the values she feels she shares with her immediate colleagues. It was clear that that this collective planning identity was, to some extent, felt to be under threat, and that the rationalities embedded in the new system blocked the performance of an existing identity that was still strongly valued.

This vignette, and the example of the SHLAA, provides details of one moment where a local planning culture and the identities strongly rooted within it were forced into a change by the rationalities of the new planning system. It was clear that this caused

considerable frustration, and stood as a symbol for Anna of a central thrust of modernisation, fuelling her distrust of the government's agenda. Anna's feelings of resistance and sympathy for the "back to the local plan" approach should not, however be dismissed as "backward looking". This resistance was not born of a fundamental conservatism holding back essential modernisation. Rather it was rooted in her attempt to defend a highly valued landscape, a task she felt to be threatened by the new policy framework in which she was obliged to work. The power of centrally-determined rationalities to command the performance of a more permissive planning therefore challenged the heart of Anna's commitment to the job. This resulted in the distance between the values that motivated her and those that she felt herself working towards, previously quite effectively aligned, increasing. This was clearly difficult for Anna and was compounded by a series of other changes that left her feeling that she was often no longer even engaged in "real planning" work. She confessed to feeling so exasperated she had, on occasion, considered resigning, and had seen colleagues reach similar lows. Anna was clearly not ready to accept a new identity, rooted in a more pro-growth culture, and thus was required to manage the apparently expanding distance between her values and her practice.

Boundary work and the negotiation of a spatial planning identity

The second vignette concerns Katie, a principal planning officer in an urban authority. She too is an impressively reflective practitioner, insightful and willing to frankly explore her understanding of the new planning system. Katie studied planning as an undergraduate student having always had a strong interest in architecture and design, and views her commitment to the job as vocational. Like many of the planners I spoke with, however, she describes this commitment in slightly embarrassed terms,

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suggesting a sense that such high-minded values might seem some way distant from the reality of her practice:

It's more the public good, it sounds a bit kind of em [laughs] a bit kind of over the top, but yeah, making sure the time's were the best they could be for the people I suppose.

This sense of working for the "public good", and of a social rather than environmental commitment to planning was allied to a strong identification with a public service ethos, and a desire to benefit the lives of all in the community rather than only "narrow" private interests (cf. Campbell and Marshall, 2001). In this sense Katie clearly identified with the challenges of working in a growth-orientated authority where spatial issues have high corporate priority and planning policy has been embraced as a means of meeting these challenges. When I first meet with her she has just finished the examination into an Area Action Plan (AAP) for the regeneration of a significant urban quarter, a piece of work that she has invested large amounts of herself into, suggesting a personal commitment that raises the stakes for the strategy's success or failure:

It can become very all consuming, I'm very aware that in the last few months it's just been work. And I think that's partly down to the fact that if the inspector find this [the AAP] unsound that I've wasted two and a half years.

By the time we meet again the AAP has indeed been passed as "sound". Throughout both interviews it is clear that Katie identifies strongly with the new system and the

shift to spatial planning, an identification born of the positive experience of producing the AAP. This was a process in which planning had played a major role in developing and bringing forward the vision of a wider local partnership. Katie thus considers herself a spatial planner:

> *It's much more than just land-use. In a way I'm a bit jealous of the old days when you could just sit in your office and write something, write a policy that sounded good…Now there's so much more to it, there's so much talking to other, other thing's that are beyond planning's scope…It's a good positive move, but just makes it harder work.*

Her description of her role as being "more than *just* land-use" invokes a widely used definition of spatial planning, one reproduced in the centrepiece of the government's planning guidance (ODPM, 2005). The new practices this has drawn Katie into, central to the definition of emerging practice in spatial planning (cf. RTPI 2007, CLG 2008), have involved forms of "boundary work" (cf. Fournier 2000, Newman and Nutley 2003) - seeking to renegotiate the scope and influence of planning's role locally, and thereby to occupy the more "visionary" and "proactive" subject position that she identifies with. Though accepting that this was a work in progress, Katie was, in general, optimistic, feeling that the AAP had played a leading role in promoting this desired change:

> *I think it has turned a corner from the local plan that was seen as the more kind of old-fashioned view of planning, the rules and regulations and the "thou shalt not" kind of thing.*

However, at times, she was reminded that there was still some way to go before this claim to a new planning identity would be accepted. One such incident occurred while she was beginning preliminary research into proposals for a new AAP, designed to regenerate a deprived housing estate - a task she recognised as central to the more socially engaged planning she wanted to practice. Whilst reading an internal document produced by the authority's property section describing existing proposals for the estate, she found a page marked *Planning*, which contained, "all the negative stereotypes of problems with planning" laid out as a warning that the planning process could act as a barrier to regeneration. She had found this "really disheartening", suggesting that:

> *I don't think that other people see us as being visionary at all, I think we still suffer from a reputation for being stuck in the mud and bureaucratic and not being very, you know not being very visionary and being proactive.*

This incident had served as a reminder that the new visionary and proactive planning identity to which she aspired – values that she explicitly recognised as being "more new system" – was not necessarily available until others could be convinced of planning's worth. Thus, despite signs of change, she was forced to accept that truly effective partnership and integration required a further shift in planning's image locally:

> *It's just that little stigma thing about what a planner is and what a planner does that we need to do a little more work on.*

This incident revealed to Katie the limits of her own agency to take on a new role, and thereby to fulfil the spatial planning identity to which she aspired. It further suggests the extent to which processes of culture change within large organisations are fraught with multiple possible points of resistance (cf. Alvesson and Svenningsson 2008, Shaw, 2006). Thus, despite the presence of high-level corporate and political support for spatial planning, certain barriers remained. In relation to English planning the vignette also invokes Underwood's (1980) account of planners in the London Borough of Haringey and their frustrated search for a more corporately influential role in the 1970s, and the sense of "role confusion" that has long marked the planning profession's uncertain boundaries (Reade 1987).

It is also necessary, however, to place this vignette in context to fully appreciate the complexity of the identity work Katie was engaged in. Interestingly, whilst keen to embrace the possibilities of cross-boundary working, she was also made aware of certain limits to her own willingness to embrace the principle of integration. In particular she sensed the potential to lose her distinctive identity as a planner if this logic was extended too far:

> *[I'm] more than happy to work with other departments and other sections and I think we need to, but I still think it needs to be recognised that we're planners rather than just other strategy makers or whatever.*

For Katie the basis of this claim to a distinctive planning identity lay, in large part, in the rigour of the planning process that ensured both extensive public involvement and

the statutory power to actually "deliver" or implement policy. This was contrasted to strategies produced by other services that were essentially aspirational and lacked democratic legitimacy or the power to actually be realised rather than simply "sitting on a shelf". Thus in the process of engaging with a cross-boundary, spatial planning identity, Katie was made aware of her own attachment to the regulatory powers of the statutory planning system, and their value to her identity claims. In so doing she recognised a certain tension within spatial planning between calls to go beyond the statutory planning system, and the continued basis in that system of planning's claims to exercise a distinctive agency.

For Katie the negotiation of a new spatial planning identity had been a welcome and positive experience, bringing with it a sense that she was working more closely in line with the values that motivated her. Moments of doubt or frustration such as that described above were generally easily managed or accepted as part of a broader movement towards the realisation of a desired identity. Nonetheless, it was also clear that as she was drawn into the "boundary work" required to renegotiate planning's identity locally, she was confronted by both the limits of her own agency to bring about the desired change, and of her willingness to embrace this change. As such she struggled at times to negotiate the "best fit" she could between the values she was obliged to perform in practice and those she espoused. As she did so it was also apparent that she was drawn into a process of mediation of some of the tensions inherent to the concept of spatial planning. It remained unclear to what extent it was possible to manage or balance these tensions in such a way as to sustain a coherent identity as a spatial planner.

Conclusions: paying attention to planners' identity work

These two vignettes, taken together, do not offer a comprehensive account of the experience of "being modernised/ modernising", or of the variety of different kinds of "identity work" that planners have been engaged in as they adjust their practices to the new ideological ethos of spatial planning. Indeed, a comprehensive account of the different identity regulating obligations to which Anna and Katie alone sought to respond would require a lot more "colouring in" (and would suggest a more complex, fragmented picture of their professional identities). Rather they provide two situated examples of the types of "identity work" that these changes have instigated - one a story of attempted resistance and the consequences of enforced identity regulation; the other of an attempt to embrace change, and subsequent exploration of the limits of planning's empowerment and to the availability of a spatial planning identity. They do, however, provide scope for a number of more broadly generalisable reflections on the nature of planners' identities, and the types of identity work that "modernisation" has entailed in England:

- They draw attention to the limits of the agency exercised by planners at the local level to effectively resist, but also to embrace the new subject positions created by "modernisation". As a result they re-iterate the complexity of processes of culture change. In so doing they also ask that we consider the possibility that acts of resistance are more than knee-jerk conservatism, and can often be rooted in strongly felt values and identities, and a genuine disagreement with the principles and practices of modernisation (cf. Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Marquand, 2004). Even where modernisation has been

embraced meanwhile it is suggested that change remains complex, very difficult to govern or engineer and likely to prove a slow process over which planners themselves exercise limited agency (cf. Shaw, 2006; Schein, 1992).

- They suggest that planners' identities are structured by the statutory planning system in a way that calls for "culture change" have perhaps not always fully appreciated. These have sometimes asserted that a positive culture is capable of overcoming some of the systemic inertia generated by onerous statutory requirements (e.g. CLG, 2008). Technologies such as SHLAA, however, carry rationalities that have strong identity regulatory functions. Planners meanwhile remain aware that the regulatory powers of the statutory system, though a limitation on planning's flexibility, constitute a key dimension of both their identities and capacity to argue for a distinctive role within local governance.

- They point to some of the tensions within the spatial planning agenda that impact on planners' capacity to make sense of the identity regulating intentions of reform. In the first vignette, for example, Anna recognised elements of the agenda with which she identified but did not trust that these were the central thrust of change, leading her towards an identity rooted in resistance to the new system. In the second example Katie found herself trying to mediate the tension between the imperative to go beyond boundaries and a continued reliance on planning's regulatory powers, rooted in the statutory planning system.

- Within the field of obligations in which public sector planners work it is necessary for them to negotiate their sense of self at work in relation to the distance between their espoused values and values in use. Planners often seek to find an organisational fit with their own values (Thomas and Healey, 1991), but this may change over time in relation to a range of factors, including the wider, national policy framework. The capacity to manage this distance is therefore a key form of identity work for planners. The ways in which this distance is negotiated has often been overlooked within planning research, which has tended to be focused on values in use to the exclusion of espoused values. Though this is perhaps an understandable focus of attention, there is scope for considerable further work to explore, for example, how public sector planners negotiate their professional identities in the complex spaces of the contemporary state. And particularly the ways in which they use different forms of distancing to manage the gap between the normative aspirations they profess and the frequently frustrating realities of practice. Existing literature suggests that professionals may use a wide range of coping strategies, including changing jobs, active resistance, humour, cynical compliance or acquiescence (e.g. Halford and Leonard, 1999).

- By extension it seems that the policy and professional communities nationally who have "authored" the planning reforms, as well as the academic community, could benefit from a more attentive listening to the tensions and frustrations experienced by practitioners. The stresses of work in the public sector have occasioned some concerns (e.g. RTPI, 2008), but much of the basis for debate about spatial planning remains highly normative (cf.

Allmendinger, 2006), and fails to fully recognise the implications of central tensions in the planning reform agenda.

- The recurrence of calls for planning to attract the "best and brightest" into the profession (Barker, 2006), meanwhile, is indicative of a certain impatience with planners' capacities and responsiveness to change. Such calls have a significant genealogy in UK planning (see e.g. Keeble, 1961; Eversley, 1973), and invoke the "superhero" problem (Glass, 1959) - can the planner ever be good enough to achieve everything asked of her (Abram, 2004)? A more attentive practice of listening may, however, lead to a more sympathetic understanding of the pressures and tensions planners have been put under as they seek to negotiate the shift to a new system and make sense of the highly normative exhortations emanating from the national level. Overall, my research suggests a group of committed but often frustrated professionals who regularly feel more like mistrusted "objects" of centrally imposed reforms than valued agents, and who also feel that they are being asked to manage an overwhelming and ever expanding burden of work. The effects of this on morale, and the further strengthening of planners' reliance on forms of distancing to manage their sense of self at work, suggest serious concerns for the future.

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Identity regulation
Discursive practices concerned with identity definition that condition processes of identity formation and transformation

Prompts

Informs

Identity Work
Interpretive activity involved in reproducing and transforming self-identity

Accomplished through

Responsive or resistant to both

Re-works

Self-Identity
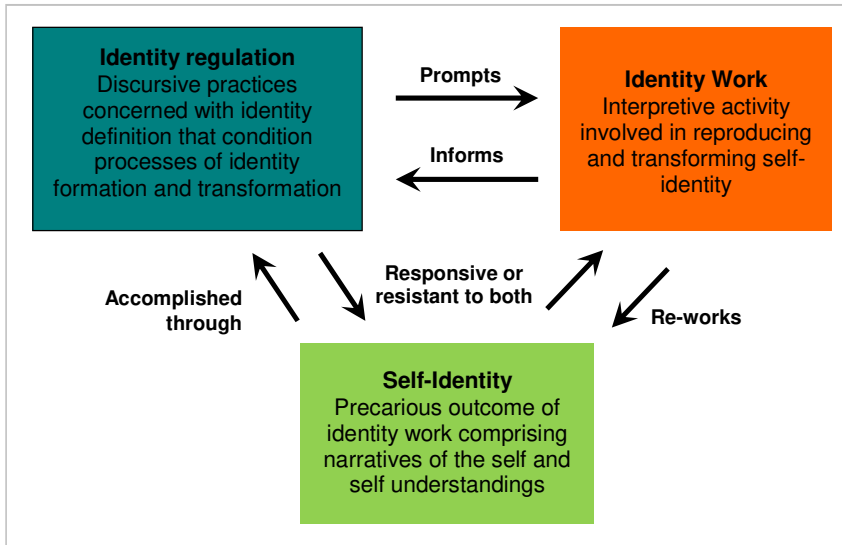Precarious outcome of identity work comprising narratives of the self and self understandings

Figure 1 - Identity regulation, identity work and self-identity (from Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).