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Policy and Practice
The EU referendum, planning and the environment: where now for the UK?

The referendum of 23 June 2016, in which the UK voted to leave the European Union, has potentially far-reaching implications for planning, especially its interface with environmental policy. While the five months since the referendum show stability in the worlds of planning practice, moves to renegotiate the UK's relationship with Europe raise a number of important questions: will we see an erosion of the firm environmental standards and targets characteristic of EU environmental policy? Will business interests and infrastructure proponents be successful in arguing that Brexit requires yet further growth-supporting measures? How will the evident salience of immigration, sovereignty and identity concerns shape planning and environmental policy? Will the devolved governments thwart or redirect the 'leave' process? Alongside responses to specific institutional changes, planning and environmental bodies will need to respond to a political context in which elites are mistrusted, the benefits of globalisation and supra-national governance are questioned, and 'putting Britain first' is a discourse with increased traction.

Keywords: European Union, planning, United Kingdom, referendum, Brexit

Introduction

On 23 June 2016, the referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union (EU) delivered its result, with 51.9 per cent of voters supporting leave against 48.1 per cent voting for remain. As a result, after 43 years of membership, the UK has begun the political process of exiting the EU[1] – or 'Brexit' for short.

There is consensus on two things. First, that the effects of the UK leaving the EU could be pervasive, touching many aspects of the economy, society and politics within the UK and beyond. Second, there is a consensus that any effects are highly uncertain. Uncertainty swirls around short-term legal and political questions: will 'Brexit' also mean leaving the single market? Does the current government have the legitimacy to determine what Brexit means without securing the consent of Parliament, the electorate or the devolved governments of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? Uncertainty also surrounds any longer-term consequences as businesses, markets, prospective migrants and political parties respond to the unfolding situation. Beyond

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[1]   Technically the UK joined the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, which only became the European Union in 1993 with the signing of the Maastricht Treaty. For simplicity, this review refers to the European Union (EU) throughout.

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these two points of consensus, perspectives on what could and should happen next are as divided as the referendum campaign itself.

Given this, identifying the implications for planning is a hazardous enterprise. Certainly, the referendum result has been presented as presaging an era of policy openness (Usherwood, 2016). However, one may question whether Brexit necessarily moves the evolution of UK planning onto some wholly new trajectory. For all the uncertainties, some scenarios for UK planning and cognate aspects of environmental policy post-Brexit are highly credible because they represent an extrapolation of trends already powerful prior to June 2016, and have been boosted by the political dynamics of the referendum event itself.

Table 1   The United Kingdom's EU referendum timeline

January 2013	Prime Minister David Cameron promises that should the Conservative Party win a majority in the 2015 general election he would pursue a renegotiation of the UK's relationship with the EU and then hold a referendum on EU membership. Subsequent proposed legislation included a deadline for that referendum of 31 December 2017
2015	Conservatives fight the 2015 general election with a manifesto promise to hold an in–out referendum on EU membership; most other parties include support for, or proposals on, EU referenda in their manifestos.
7 May 2015	The Conservative Party win the general election, following which legislation is passed (the European Union Referendum Act 2015) making provision for an advisory referendum on the UK's EU membership.
23 June 2016	Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, producing a 51.9% vote to leave
24 June 2016	Prime Minister David Cameron resigns
13 July 2016	Theresa May replaces David Cameron as prime minister
2 October 2016	Theresa May announces that her government will trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty at the end of March 2017, beginning the formal process of securing a separation agreement with the European Union, in a process formally limited to two years.
3 November 2016	The High Court rules that the government does not have the authority to trigger Article 50 without consulting Parliament; the government appeals the ruling, with the case due to reach the Supreme Court on 7 December 2016 [AQ1]

Taking up this argument, this review of policy and practice outlines and assesses the likely effects of the UK's departure from EU membership on planning, especially its interface with environmental policy. It draws upon information available at the time of writing (November 2016), which is mostly opinion-based writing in the professional press, the blogosphere and government speeches and announcements, backed

by interviews with practitioners.[2] Table 1 places this period in a longer time frame. The review begins by summarising how land use planning in the UK has been shaped by EU membership, then outlines different Brexit scenarios, before considering key issues that may emerge once the leave process gets under way: the risks of further deregulation of planning and environmental policy; intensified pro-growth policies; the influence of concerns around immigration, identity and sovereignty; and the devolution dimension.

The Europeanisation of UK planning

On the face of it, planning in the UK has not been deeply affected by the EU. The founding principles and institutional norms of the planning system are mainly products of the UK's legal and administrative context with relatively little influence from abroad (Newman and Thornley, 1996; Nadin and Shaw, 1997). Moreover, within the framework of EU membership, land-use planning remains largely a national matter, as EU legislation in this sphere can only be adopted by unanimity (Article 192(2), Treaty on European Union). Consequently, UK national and devolved governments have been by far the greatest shapers of the procedures, organisational structures and goals of planning.

Nevertheless, planning is a broad and porous policy sphere, highly open to external influences. As a result, policies emanating from the EU have driven a wide-ranging set of changes to the system, even if '[t]he overwhelming majority of these measures are not focused explicitly on planning' (Bishop et al., 2000, 309; Haigh, 1989; Morphet, 2013; Tewdwr-Jones and Williams, 2001). These influences can be organised into four main groups (Cowell and Owens, 2016).

- Firmer environmental standards. A key effect of EU membership has been to institute firmer, substantive standards for environmental protection than UK governments might have been disposed to do. Prime examples are the nature-conservation directives for Birds (79/409/EEC) and Habitats (92/43/EEC), where the need to demonstrate 'imperative reasons of overriding public interest' (Commission of the European Communities, 2000 [AQ2]) sets a stiff test for projects that threaten sites and species designated under EU legislation. For air quality, UK standards are underpinned by the 2008 Ambient Air Quality Directive (2008/50/EC), which lays down precise limit values for a range of pollutants and requires action to meet them. Such directives set the context within which planning operates and reduce the scope for domestic actors to trade environmental quality for economic goals.
- Shaping decision-making procedures. EU membership has had the effect of

2   Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with planning professionals in the public and private sectors.

promoting public participation, improving access to justice and enhancing the availability of environmental information. With the directives on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (85/337/EC and subsequent amendments) and the directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) (2001/42/EC), EU action has formalised what might otherwise have been a more flexible and voluntaristic British approach (Jordan, 2002), standardising the information that must be provided, and enabling proposals to be scrutinised and decision-makers to be held to account (Sheate, 2012). In many instances, EIA and SEA have led to tangible – if generally incremental – improvements to projects and plans (Glasson et al., 2012[AQ3]). The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) also has an important role securing compliance with the Aarhus Convention.[3]

- Integrated spatial and environmental governance. The EU has been a promoter of 'joined-up' or integrated approaches to planning, where actors in different sectors (e.g. transport, environment, housing, energy) strive to coordinate their strategies, and has encouraged planning at spatial scales better attuned to ecological, economic and social processes. Here the EU has exerted influence through the generation of ideas, notably the much-discussed European Spatial Development Perspective and its successors (Morphet, 2015), from which concepts of sectorally integrated 'spatial planning' influenced previous Labour governments' Regional Spatial Strategies in England (Haughton et al., 2010) and national spatial planning by the devolved governments (Harris et al., 2002). EU funding has also incentivised action, with the INTERREG programme designed to foster collaboration between regions in different member states on cross-border and transnational issues (Colomb, 2007; Dühr and Nadin, 2007). UK planning authorities have been frequent participants. The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) has also been flagged as stimulating a 'comprehensive, holistic and sustainable approach' to water policy, with ramifications for planning (Carter and White, 2012; 2331; White and Howe, 2003).

- Infrastructure and economic regeneration. An important part of the context for planning in many parts of the UK is EU funding for the economic development of lagging regions and deepening market integration. The implications for land use planning are especially clear for infrastructure. EU structural funds have been important in supporting projects represented as having economic growth benefits, such as roads, with the EU also providing policies and resources for promoting 'Trans-European Transport Networks', addressing 'border crossings, missing links and bottlenecks' in cross-EU mobility (Dühr et al., 2010 [AQ4]). The EU has also promoted the integration of energy networks across its territory (EC, 2011). As well as drawing up strategies and priority corridors for gas pipelines and electricity

3   The UN Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters

grids, the Commission has also pushed measures that accelerate decision making, by defining certain infrastructures as 'projects of European significance' and then instituting fixed time frames for determining consents. In this sphere the UK is seen by Europe as something of a leader (Marshall, 2014).

So EU membership has undeniably impacted UK planning, directly in terms of planning procedures but also through shaping the wider regulatory and developmental context. Arguably, these effects have been the most significant (and enduring) in the environmental sphere, given the EU's acknowledged importance in shaping the national environmental policy of member states (Burns et al., 2016). EU legislation and targets also shape development patterns in spheres like waste management, driving the move away from landfill, and renewable energy expansion, in turn requiring planning responses.

However, specifying the 'additional effect' of EU membership on domestic planning policy and practice is tricky. This is partly because research has tended to focus on the initial adoption of EU measures and not on the long-term effects of implementation, where CJEU enforcement action and practitioners' decisions can have big effects (Borrass et al., 2015). Charting subtler, longer-term effects on learning (organisational and individual) and the reframing of objectives for planning is always challenging (Colomb, 2007), not helped by the UK government's politically motivated tendency to obscure when UK domestic policy is driven by EU agendas (Morphet, 2013). The overall 'net effect' of EU membership on planning outcomes also requires careful deciphering. As well as promoting environmental protection, the EU's agendas for free trade and market integration, economic competitiveness and labour market mobility – which have all intensified since the Lisbon Treaty – have shaped the nature, level and location of development and are thus implicated in the environmental pressures of growth. Indeed, EU economic agendas can challenge and undermine the EU's own environmental-protection policies (Richardson, 1997; Pustelnik, 2016). Understanding the effect of Brexit on planning thus needs to consider different dimensions – environmental, economic, political – and their interactions.

The meaning of Brexit and road towards it

The effects of Brexit on planning will depend substantially on the nature of any exit agreement negotiated between the UK government and the EU. Should the UK government seek to leave the EU but remain a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) (and thus the single market), then the UK will need to remain compliant with some 80 per cent of the EU environmental *acquis*, such as EIA. However, some of the most significant planning-related measures – notably the Habitats and Birds Directives – would not be required (ENDS Report, 2015c), giving UK governments the scope to make changes.

If Britain leaves the EU and does not remain within the EEA, then the opportunities to revise domestic legislation would be less constrained. The consequences would then be contingent on how far environmental issues become relevant to any alternative trade agreements negotiated, on the priorities of the government of the day and on the balance of power between different interests. Environmental regulations attached to traded products might be likeliest to remain in place. However, one can hypothesise that land-based issues, always sensitive to concerns about national sovereignty and with a more complex, indirect relation to trade, would be weaker contenders for inclusion in future trade agreements.

At the time of writing, the likely form of any exit agreement is unclear but evidently subject to profound dilemmas. Although the government is not issuing a 'running commentary' on its approach to negotiations with the EU, ministers have signalled their opposition to any arrangement that prevented the UK government exercising control over immigration (May, 2016). Meanwhile, European leaders have underlined that free movement of EU citizens is fundamental to retaining access to the single market (as it is with Norway, for example). The result is a challenge 'of a complexity and magnitude no British government has faced since 1945' (Peston, 2016). On one side is considerable business and political pressure to remain within the EEA, which also enables access to a range of EU programmes on, inter alia, science and the environment. On the other side, controlling immigration has transmuted from a key platform of the leave campaign and the Eurosceptic press to being represented as the authentic 'will of the people' by the referendum vote and thus non-negotiable. Delivering an exit agreement palatable to all parties seems impossible; consequently autumn 2016 was filled with questions about the democratic process by which the UK's negotiating position will be developed and approved.

In the face of such high-consequence decisions, the government has acted to foster short-term stability. The government set out its preferred timetable for Brexit: it has stated the intention to trigger Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty at the end of March 2017, thus formally beginning exit negotiations, which according to the article must then be completed in two years. In addition, the government has issued a flurry of assurances that it will honour current financial commitments to recipients of EU agricultural support, structural funds and science programmes (Hammond, 2016).[4] On the legal front, the government has proposed a Great Repeal Bill which, on the day of exit, will instantly annul the 1972 European Communities Act that has given EU law legal effect in the UK and convert all its provisions into UK law. It has been described as offering 'snapshot transposition' (Elliott, 2016), and seeks to achieve the neatening effect of keeping the UK compliant with EU legislation for as long as it

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4   In some instances until the date of leaving the EU, or until 2020, or for the duration of any specific agreement entered into.

remains a member, meaning that altering the institutional inheritance of the EU might not begin until 2019 at the earliest. That is the ideal; legal realities may be considerably more complex (EDIE, 2016b).

Implications for planning

By autumn 2016, planning and environmental interests found themselves between big questions for which answers are awaited, on the one hand, and an apparent continuation of the *status quo ex ante*, on the other. Perhaps it is wise, then, for practitioners to 'leave the panicking to others' (Mark Tewdwr-Jones quoted in Dewar, 2016). As interviewees commented, the planning system has always coped with change and there is no reason to believe that it will not adapt to whichever variant of Brexit emerges. However, even where practitioners feel that 'planning won't change', there was a recognition that 'everything around it will' (interview), and these shifts in the wider context could have profound implications.

In assessing the effects of Brexit, however, it is important to remember that planning in the UK is already entrained in processes of profound change driven by domestic political agendas. Since the start of the twenty-first century, successive reforms to the system have pursued deregulation and simplification in the name of economic competitiveness, with representations of planning as a 'barrier' to growth being wielded repeatedly to promote 'efficiency and expedition' (Samuels, 2015, 646), especially for infrastructure investment. The effects have been to increase the power of developers and reinforce growth agendas whilst encouraging a dismantling of effective strategic planning, especially in England, eclipsing attention to complex issues like sustainability and spatial equity, and creating an ill-conducive context for developing more cohesive, integrated approaches to planning (Dühr and Nadin, 2007). The opportunities available to those who would use the planning system to promote environmental sustainability have been diminished (DCLGSC, 2014), dissipating the environmental-protection role of the system overall (Cowell, 2013; Lee et al., 2013).

Given this, one can acknowledge the 'cataclysmic' nature of the referendum result and resulting uncertainty about the future, but still pose focused questions about the future. In short, do we have good reason to expect the EU referendum result to alter the dominant directions of change for planning in the UK?

Thinking about the future also means looking beyond legal analyses of possibilities and constraints to consider how the referendum itself, as a 'political moment', generated impetus for certain agendas and actors while marginalising others. This too indicates which scenarios might have most traction.

Towards further deregulation?

There is broad agreement that '[t]he UK's membership of the EU has improved the UK's approach to environmental protection and ensured that the UK environment has been better protected' (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2016a, 28) and, concomitantly, widespread fear from the environmental sector that the referendum result would lead to those improvements stagnating or going into reverse (EDIE, 2016a; ENDS Report, 2016a; 2016b[AQ5]). The EU has helped foster a coherent, ambitious and stable framework of environmental regulation in the UK, which is now at risk of becoming fragmented and subject to short-termist, politically driven changes in the name of economic growth (indeed, see House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee, 2016b).

Planning would be affected by such an outturn and, as a policy sphere more profoundly shaped by national legislation, shows the credibility of such fears. Not only has there has been an erosion of environmental agendas within planning policy, as discussed above, but also EU membership has evidently provided a bulwark against further change. For example, the National Planning Policy Framework (for England), which collapsed a library of planning policy into a single document, still states that '[p]lanning policies and decisions must reflect and where relevant promote relevant EU obligations and statutory requirements' (DCLG, 2012, para. 2). Yet government ministers regularly criticised EU 'regulatory creep … imposing additional and expensive requirements on the planning system', all the worse for being 'over and above long-standing, domestic environmental safeguards in planning law'.[5] Such remarks exemplify both the persistent equation of environmental regulation with 'cost' and an equally persistent national chauvinism, often evident in previous government dealings with the EU, that policy ideas from abroad add little to domestic practices (Haigh, 1989; Jordan, 2002).

There are further warning signs. The business sector evidently enjoys close access to government deregulation agendas, with EU regulation in its sights (see Business Taskforce, 2013). In various areas the UK government is already dragging its feet or defaulting on implementation of EU policy, most notably on improving urban air quality where infraction fines are a real threat (ENDS Report, 2016a; House of Lords, 2016). Procedural rights around environmental decision-making are another point of tension. CJEU decisions have underscored the standing of environmental organisations in representing legitimate public interests and pressed the UK government on improving financial protection for those bringing environmental cases before the courts (Maurici and Moules, 2014; ENDS Report, 2015b), while the UK domestic agenda has pushed in the opposite direction, including sustained downward pressure on access to judicial review (Rice, 2016).

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5   From Eric Pickles MP, Hansard, 6 December 2012, Written Ministerial Statements, Communities and Local Government, Planning Administration, cols 71–72 WS.

Looking back at the referendum debate and associated media coverage, environmental aspects of EU membership were notable by their virtual absence (ENDS Report, 2016b). Climate change is the exception, with the referendum prompting government affirmations of UK support for the Paris Agreement. One reading of this situation is that in the referendum 'the public did not vote for a race to the bottom' for environmental policy (ENDS Report, 2016a, 6). Yet arguably environmental regulation was present in the process, in the language of 'red tape', something both 'remain' and 'leave' campaigners expressed a keenness to reduce (Cameron, 2015). Overall, environment issues received little impetus from the referendum.

The planning profession evidently recognises the plausibility of future deregulation, but to date seems relatively sanguine. In the short term nothing is changing: new EU directives are still being transposed into national legislation (Carpenter, 2016 [AQ6]); much depends on whether the UK renegotiates membership of the EEA. Looking further ahead, only incremental changes are expected (Dunton, 2016). The sheer complexity of unpicking environmental safeguards is deemed likely to deter major change (Garlick, 2016). Commentators regularly argue that, even outside the EU, the fact that the UK has ratified almost forty international treaties means that many environmental-protection obligations will remain (see Macrory, 2016; Woolford and Hunt, 2016). Is this optimistic? Most international agreements lack mechanisms for enforcement and redress, yet with EU environmental policy it has often been precisely the effect of infraction proceedings, legal decisions and potential fines that has improved implementation on the ground (Borrass et al., 2015).

Numerous environmental bodies have expressed intentions to both defend and enhance the UK's environmental policy framework post-Brexit (ENDS Report, 2016a), and there are opportunities for gains. For example, the replacement of the Common Agricultural Policy could herald moves towards a more sustainable and integrated approach to land management (House of Lords, 2016). However, they do so in political circumstances much less auspicious than the 1980s and 1990s when EU environmental policy expanded most significantly. Since 2010, UK governments have abolished major environmental bodies (the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution and the Sustainable Development Commission) and barred statutory conservation bodies from commenting publicly on government policy, and austerity has greatly reduced staffing and expertise across the public sector, in national and local government and within various agencies. Advocates of maintaining the EU environmental policy inheritance are also up against organisations that may view the opportunities of Brexit very differently.

A new context for economic development

If environmental issues were marginalised in the referendum debate, effects on the economy were centre stage, with the 'remain' camp making the economic risks of leaving the EU pivotal to their campaign. The possibility of economic downturn was evidently a source of anxiety to planners, especially those on the development industry side. Commentators suggested that development schemes may become vulnerable and so 'councils need to be open to re-examining schemes viability' [AQ7] (Garlick, 2016, 3; Dewar, 2016; Gardiner, 2016).

As yet, the referendum outcome has had little obvious effect. Planning consultants reported short-term 'tremors' after the outcome, as market uncertainties affected share prices of housebuilding companies. The main effect was to cause a pause to development projects during July and August. By September the pipeline of projects was back on track, with little evidence that Brexit of itself was pushing developers to renegotiate social or environmental obligations. This steadiness is attributed to beliefs that the fundamentals driving the demand for housing and other projects are essentially sound.

Economic indicators may shift as the contours of any exit and trade agreements emerge (Dunton, 2016); however, Brexit is not an event with purely 'objective' properties, but something that can be represented and mobilised in support of particular agendas. Much will depend on whether different interests represent Brexit as a crisis or an opportunity. The 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath suggests that business and development interests can be particularly effective in using arguments about uncertainty and the need to stimulate growth to articulate the case for speeding up planning and more growth-accommodating environmental regulation (see Business Taskforce, 2013). An important post-referendum political narrative is that the UK should become 'a global champion of free trade', an agenda suggested to require 'very ambitious deregulation of its economy' (Booth et al., 2015), further cuts to corporation tax (Spence, 2016), and/or much greater international access to UK markets and public assets. None of these steps appear helpful to public-interest planning, social justice or environmental policy.

Infrastructure projects have been pulled both ways in post-referendum planning debates, being 'under threat' from the prospects of reduced funding (Dewar, 2016), especially with loss of access to EU structural and investment funds (Carpenter, 2016 [AQ6]), but also represented as more essential than ever, given the need to demonstrate that the UK is 'open for business', including by planning commentators (Garlick, 2016; Walker, 2016). The latter perspective seems to be ascendant, with the government giving its support to a series of long-controversial projects since 23 June: Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, a third runway at Heathrow and reaffirmations of commitment to the HS2 high-speed rail line (May, 2016).

What gives infrastructure projects wider significance is that, historically, conflicts

about major projects have often played a formative role in debates about sustainability, public policy and environmental standards (Cowell and Owens, 2006). An example would be how specific decisions on projects have shaped the interpretation of EU environmental policy, notably the strength of wildlife protection given by the Habitats and Birds Directives (Borrass et al., 2015). Those concerned about the possible erosion of EU-based environmental standards would thus be wise to look closely at how debates around politically popular infrastructure projects inform wider policy, as proponents press for steps to cheapen and de-risk delivery. One obvious focus is prospective new runways at Heathrow, where air quality already approaches EU permitted levels (ENDS Report, 2015a).

Politics of sovereignty, identity and immigration

It would be superficially easy to frame debates around Brexit and planning along familiar axes of environment and economy, but this omits a set of issues for which the referendum was a lightning rod – about immigration, sovereignty and identity, borne along by wider 'undercurrents of disillusionment and disconnection' (Campbell, 2016, 489) from the status quo. Analysis of referendum voting suggests that, for many people, beliefs about the erosion of British sovereignty, loss of identity and controlling immigration outweighed messages of economic risk attached to leaving the EU and the single market (Curtice, 2016).

Since June such issues have hung in the air, scarcely touching ground with the worlds of planning or environmental policy. Discussion within the planning profession has focused on immediate, material implications, i.e. how tighter national immigration controls may affect migration patterns and, in turn, the veracity of population data and housing projections underpinning calculations of housing need (Geoghegan, 2016; Dewar, 2016; Dunton, 2016; Marrs, 2016). Public concern at the effects of 'incomers' on housing supply and greenfield development is familiar territory to planners, making it hard to discern whether the post-Brexit atmosphere on immigration will affect technical practicalities on the ground. Effects on the labour market for planners are also limited; the distinctive institutional evolution of British planning producing a system staffed mainly by Brits. UK planning schools have much more immediate reasons for anxiety. Non-British EU academics make up 17 per cent of teaching and research posts in UK universities, which also face diminished access to EU research money, disadvantage in attracting European students, and apparent government determination to keep labelling international students 'immigrants' and include them within strategies to reduce net immigration (Rudd, 2016).

Assessing the wider implications is inevitably more speculative. The geographically and socially divided Britain revealed by patterns of referendum voting (Harris and Charlton, 2016) prompted demand that more attention be given to places and

populations 'left behind' by globalisation, which exhibit a sense of profound alienation from 'metropolitan elites' (May, 2016) and 'experts' (Campbell, 2016). Therein lie opportunities to 're-articulate the case for strategic planning' (Ellis, 2016b, 295), especially if post-referendum political rhetoric of healing divisions of wealth and opportunity translate into interest in more spatially sensitive and just development policies. For such opportunities, the Town and Country Planning Association has asserted the relevance of its values – 'inclusive, practical, hopeful' – as the basis of 'alternatives to fear and isolationism' (Ellis, 2016a, 267).

If there is some agreement on the need to address Britain's deepening social divisions, any relationship between material inequality, voting 'leave' and what actually might be done is obviously more complex. The fact that parts of the UK in receipt of significant EU structural funds expressed a strong vote to leave, such as the south Wales valleys (Wyn Jones, 2016), raises profound questions about the extent to which dominant regeneration strategies have improved people's lives. Moreover, Dorling's analysis shows that 59 per cent of those voting 'leave' were middle-class (social groups A, B and C1), not the most economically marginalised (Dorling, 2016). It may be highly indicative that the researchers that best predicted the referendum outcome drew on analysis of social media conversations.[6] Better engagement with publics in places and about places, including by planning practitioners and academics, can be valuable, but risks remaining disconnected from other sites where interpretations of the world, threats to it and desirable responses are produced, circulated and consumed. It ignores the political process, and the way in which political groups like UKIP and others have actively cultivated anti-establishment, anti-immigration and identity concerns, and enjoyed progressively greater influence on social, media and policy agendas.

Referendum slogans like 'Take back control' and 'Getting our country back' resonated widely. Such a sharp reassertion of notions of UK (and especially English) national sovereignty (Keating, 2016) confronts the ethos of environmental and planning movements that have drawn strength from articulating wider, international interests (Menon, 2016). Cities and regions may well have achieved 'leverage for place-based development to local politicians and communities' by working with the European Commission (Sykes and Schulze Baing, 2016, 210), and it is well acknowledged that environmental NGOs regularly appealed to the EU to expose deficiencies in the UK government's implementation of EU environmental policy. Are such actions now precisely the kind of circumvention of national sovereignty that, for 'leave' supporters, Brexit was designed to eliminate?

It is hard to discern where and how small changes might foretell bigger shifts. At the small scale, planning-practitioner interviewees often suggested that if Brexit creates scope to revise the Habitats Directive, there may be less need to restrict

6   The SENSEI project, funded, ironically, by the EU.

developers to conserve species and habitats common in the UK but scarce in Europe. This may be a bad time to be a great crested newt, or other species whose protection has been reinforced by being part of 'the common heritage of Europe'. At the macro scale, the call to renegotiate or sever international connections and responsibilities was central to Donald Trump's successful US presidential campaign, and his references to pursuing a programme of 'Brexit times ten' should give pause for thought. Making supra-national public issues and the benefits of international collaboration resonate in 'left-behind' communities is an enduring challenge (Burningham and Thrush, 2001); so too is retaining their place on political agendas where government ministers express their desire to 'repatriate our sovereignty' (Hammond, 2016). Remarkably less visible in these conversations about sovereignty, identity and economic justice is any concern about corporate power – the scope for multinational businesses to extract outcomes that they want from the UK or local communities in a post-Brexit world.

Emphasis on national sovereignty does not automatically mean more open national decision-making, and the first months after the referendum show reflexes towards centralised control. Any moves to open up parliamentary scrutiny of the government's Brexit strategy have been decried as thwarting 'the will of the people'. Closer examination of the proposed Great Repeal Bill shows proposals to locate the power to retain, amend or repeal EU legislation with ministers, without the approval of Parliament – a potentially major reinforcement of executive authority (Elliott, 2016). There are some countervailing pressures, however, notably devolution.

Devolution dimensions

Devolution in the UK adds further complexity to Brexit. The governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales all have particular priority issues: in Northern Ireland, there is anxiety that leaving the EU will lead to a 'harder' border with the Republic;[7] in Scotland, the 62 per cent vote in favour of 'remain' is being presented as a mandate for a possible second independence referendum; in Wales, short-term access to EU structural funds and European markets have topped the agendas of the first minister. Cutting across these issues, there are calls for the devolved nations to have a role in approving any proposed EU exit agreement, which, if it does not contain membership of the single market, they are unlikely to support. As the UK government renegotiates its relationship with Europe, domestic constitutional change is very much in the mix (Keating, 2016).

Although planning powers are already almost wholly devolved, environmental policy making is deeply entangled in these complexities. Constitutionally, environmental policy is subject to significant devolution, meaning that both devolved

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7   Space does not permit attention to the border implications for Gibraltar, where 95 per cent of voters supported remain.

governments and the UK authorities have the responsibility to implement EU environmental law and, potentially, the devolved governments would retain competencies in these areas post-Brexit (Woolford and Hunt, 2016). The devolved governments are very sensitive to risks of 'devolution reversal'; that in the exit process Westminster may take back powers, with the Great Repeal Bill being a concern.

Substantively, it raises the question whether the devolved governments will act to 'hold the line' on environmental standards and policies, where leaving the EU removes obligations that have underpinned a broadly consistent cross-UK approach. Planning practitioners in Wales are optimistic that the Welsh government's green commitments and novel legislation, like the Future Generations Act, will prevent backsliding. However, being freed from UK norms is the key attraction of devolution, and pressures to prioritise economic growth are just as keenly felt in the devolved territories.

Conclusions

Before drawing any conclusions, the reader should be reminded that this review reflects the time of writing. It was finished in November 2016, with knowledge of speeches made at the Conservative Party conference, of the prime minister's intention to trigger Article 50, and of various legal challenges to this process (see Table 1). Many things of high importance remain to be decided and clearly this review could just be documenting the mood of a particular moment. Out in the worlds of practice, any '[i]nitial shock at the result has now morphed into cautious pragmatism' (ENDS Report, 2016a, 6). Whether the UK remains part of the single market is the most obvious pivotal decision. That prospect aside, very little has changed and – among planning professionals if not environmental organisations – not much is expected to.

This raises wider questions about the experience and assessment of change while living through it. As noted above, care is required to identify how European Union membership has affected planning in the UK over the years. Understanding 'effect' means considering both changes to policy and the processes of implementation, across diverse local contexts. However, there is little reason to believe that any 'de-Europeanisation' of British planning will be qualitatively different to 43 years of Europeanisation: it will be incremental, uneven, often with tensions, not always explicit and not always heading in the expected direction (Fairbrass and Jordan, 2001). As with previous processes of Europeanisation, one should expect the planning community – as 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky, 1980) – to shape the evolution of planning post-Brexit. One should also anticipate a gradual tailoring of policy towards UK norms (House of Lords, 2016). We may see a reassertion of distinctive UK policy styles, tending to favour administrative discretion and flexibility (Jordan, 2002), and there may be many in the planning profession who would welcome a return to the

flexibility of being able to assess the 'material considerations' of the case over the rigidity of EU regulations.

But there may also be substantive patterns in such incrementalism. In the present economic and political-economic setting, and looking at the agendas that received impetus from the referendum, one can readily imagine that any new domestic flexibilities will be deployed to favour economic growth agendas. If predicting a 'race to the bottom' might strain the meaning of 'race', environmental professionals are right to be concerned about 'a stroll to the bottom' in environmental policy (EDIE, 2016a).

What makes the future especially hard to gauge is the shifting political context, which makes the era of de-Europeanisation very different from the past. Rather than seeing planning and environmental policy as affected in a linear way by the EU referendum result, it is better to examine how EU membership, planning and environmental policy are all caught up in newer political divisions, made visible by the referendum result, which posits a clash between those comfortable with globalisation and reasonably trusting of multi-level government, and those who are anxious about the costs, and express profound distrust in 'establishments' and 'metropolitan elites' perceived as ignoring them. What the public is feeling raises one set of questions, but the politics raises others. Exiting the EU can be seen as a victory for libertarian free-marketers and strands of political nationalism which – although far from comfortable bedfellows – share a disaffection for 'red tape' and the established public sphere. The future issue for those engaged in planning and environmental policy is not just how to influence specific institutional measures arising from Brexit, but where and whether to find new alignments with this political direction of travel, or challenge them.

Acknowledgements

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