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# UNDERSTANDING POWER

AND ITS NAVIGATION THROUGH THE  
PLANNING SYSTEM



# BACKGROUND

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"The purpose of planning is to reconcile the competing needs of environmental protection, social justice and economic development in the interests of the common good" (IPI, 2017)

# PRACTICE



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# THEORY- PRACTICE GAP

- Political Economy perspectives (Scott and Roweiss, 1977; Harvey, 1985)
- Neoliberalisation (Brenner et al, 2010; Sager, 2011)
- The 'Dark Side' of Planning (Flyvbjerg, 1998).
- Collaborative Planning (Healey, 1997)

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## CONCEPTIONS OF

# POWER

*"...the ability of one individual or group to affect another in a manner that disproportionately serves their own interests at the expense of others"*

(Fox-Rogers and Murphy, 2014: 246)

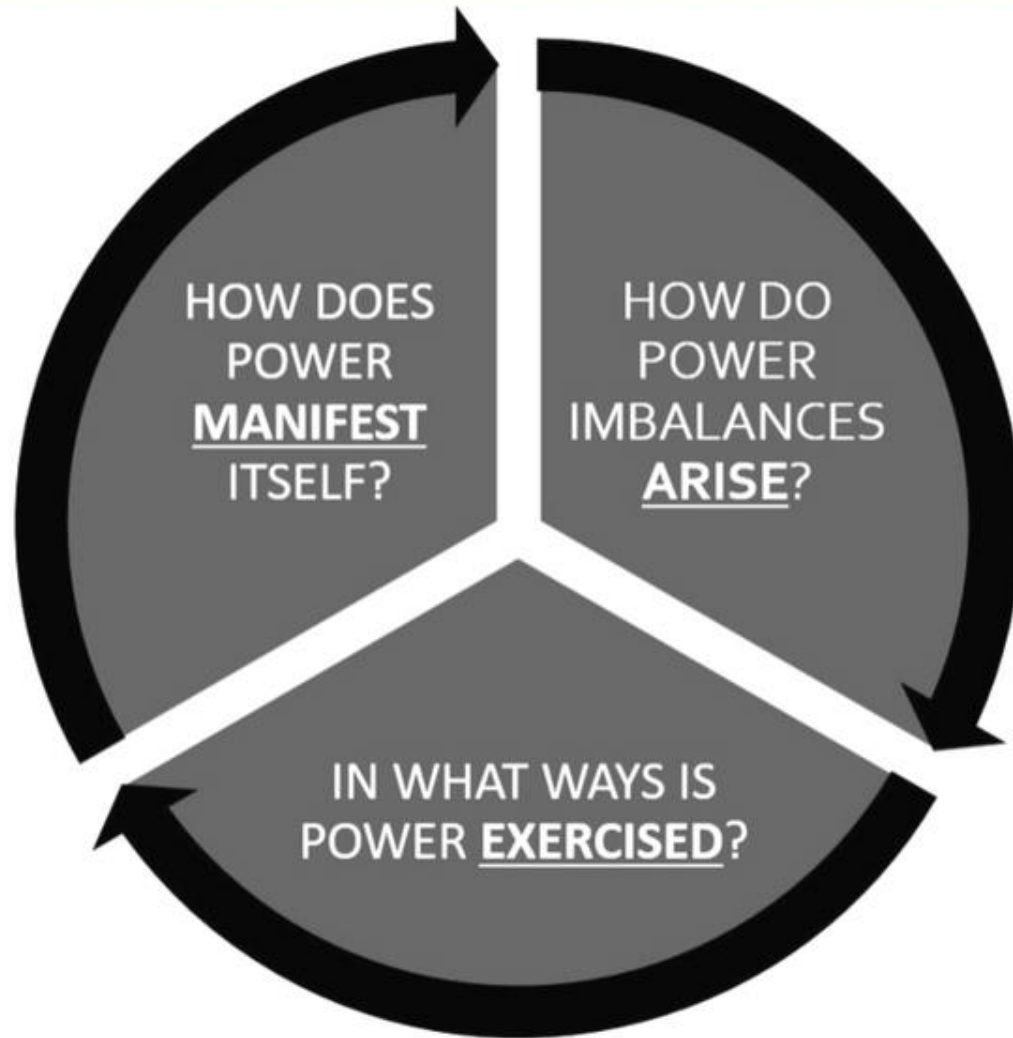
### POWER OVER

- Marxist
- Power concentrated
- Structure
- Critical

### POWER TO

- Pluralist
- Power dispersed
- Agency
- Positive

# QUESTIONS



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## HOW POWER IMBALANCES

# ARISE

Economic leverage over:

Planning Authority- Reliance on development levies/commercial rates

Politicians- Political donations is "*the only way [political parties] have of getting funds.*"

Public - "*[the community] would say 'X' and we [the developers] would say 'we're prepared to give you Y'.*"

## RESOURCES

*"...he who pays the piper calls the tune."*

## KNOWLEDGE

*"We know the planning laws inside out...we know the mechanisms there to get what we want so we use them"*

## CONTACTS

*"[Ireland] is a small country... the access to the decision makers is too easy"*

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## HOW POWER IS

# EXERCISED

Shift towards more implicit channels of influence as existing ones exposed

*"..there's lots of influences without resorting to brown bags, you know, where influence can be brought to bear on Councillors"*

*"...there's a shift away from the big cheque, but maybe more subtle things are going on".*

## PLANNING GAIN

*"...It's the new brown envelope".*

## PRE-PLANNING

*"...this has been agreed so make it work"*

## LOBBYING

*"...green can turn to gold if enough effort is brought to bear on the power structures within an area"*

## AGENTS

*"There must have been about 20 consultants on behalf of the developers sitting across the table from us and it's quite daunting and intimidating"*



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## HOW POWER BECOMES

# MANIFESTED

Outcomes not only reflect power disparities but exacerbate them by distributing wealth upwards...

*"...changing a field from agriculture to residential when land values here were kicking one and a half to two million an acre...you had potential paper millionaires overnight on the foot of a planning decision"*

*"[community 'gain'] is always buttons in comparison to what the [developers] are getting out of it"*

**UNSUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**

**ENTREPRENEURIAL  
PLANNING**

*"Certain counties can have a more aggressive economic strategy to try and get business in"*

**MARGINALISATION**

*"You feel like you're just not listened to, you might as well not be there"*

**INEQUITABLE  
OUTCOMES**





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# CONCLUSIONS

- Power is concentrated and highly dynamic in terms of how it behaves
- 'Shadow planning system' exists alongside formal structures
- Distorting effects of power more difficult to detect than ever before

# THANK YOU

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DR. LINDA FOX-ROGERS  
L.FOX-ROGERS@QUB.AC.UK

 @lindafox\_rogers

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST | SCHOOL OF NATURAL AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT