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How do local authorities experience learning in response to changing practices: a case study of the digitalisation of planning at the London Borough of Camden

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Being a dissertation submitted to the faculty of The Built Environment as part of the requirements for the award of *MSc Spatial Planning* at University College London:

I declare that this dissertation is entirely my own work and that ideas, data, and images, as well as direct quotations, drawn from elsewhere are identified and referenced.

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Abstract

This dissertation aims to assess how local authorities experience learning in response to changing practices, utilising the case study of digitalisation at the London Borough of Camden's planning team to do so. The investigation uses the frameworks of new institutionalism and new public management to approach the research, drawing from these to inform a conception of organisational learning that informs the project's argument. Through the conducting of semi-structured interviews with five professional planners at different levels of Camden's planning team the study identifies some core topics of investigation, using these to answer the initial research question and conclude that digitalisation can bring both positive and negative learning – though this is dependent on certain factors. These findings are then broadened to the wider study of local authorities, suggesting that they are adaptive institutions that can adjust to change, but need support to garner positive benefits from this. The dissertation concludes by suggesting future avenues of research into the identified phenomenon of 'intra-organisational cultures', as well as possible repeats of this methodology in different context to support this study's conclusion.

1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen the planning system in the United Kingdom increasingly move towards relying upon and functioning through local authorities and councils, who have found themselves forced to shoulder responsibilities and functions that were previously held by the central state (Haughton, Allmendinger, and Oosterlynck, 2013). Local authorities across the country are continually expected to provide more but with less resources. Inevitably, this has led to these organisations undergoing a significant amount of change, as they are forced to adopt and enact new practices to fulfil the expectations demanded of them. Much of this has taken place in the context of an increasing role for market forces and private interests in the operation of local authority work, and academics have subsequently sought to investigate how local governments can operate in response to these types of developments (Hendricks, 2014; Pierre, 2009). However, one of the starkest changes in the way that local authorities have operated in the past decades (as well as a huge number of organisations more generally) is through adopting digitalisation. The modern world of technology has shifted a huge amount of the functions of local government into a digital format, and planning is one such area that has begun this transition, albeit to different scales in varying locations. As with all significant changes in the way that other organisations operate, it is reasonable to assume that this would entail a great deal of organisational learning – both positively and negatively – for institutions that move in a digital direction.

Yet there has been surprisingly little attention within the literature applying the process of organisational learning to the phenomenon of digitalisation. A large part of this is likely the recency of the turn towards digital, as it is very much an ongoing process that has accelerated since the turn of the century and the birth of the 'digital age' (Andersson, Hallin, and Ivory, 2022). This dissertation will aim to study the ways in which local authorities respond to change and subsequently experience learning by using the case study of the London Borough of Camden and its digitalisation of planning. Although this is only one local authority out of 333 in the United Kingdom (DLUHC, 2016), the subject of digitalisation is relevant to all regardless of size or location; the 'digital turn' may occur in different ways, but the adaptation to at least some form of digitalised methods is unavoidable in the 21st century. It is thus immensely

important to understand how local authorities will experience learning through analysing the experiences of early adopters such as Camden local authority.

This study will be guided by the following research question:

> "To what extent do local authorities experience positive or negative organisational learning through implementing the digitalisation of planning?"

Chapter two of the dissertation will explore why the case study of Camden was chosen for this project, evaluating its benefits and limitations. Following this, chapter three will present a literature review that explores the key themes that underpin this dissertation and the academic frameworks that have been relied on to contribute to the study's approach. The methodology used to collect data and conduct the research will be outlined in chapter four, while chapter five will detail and explain the research findings. In chapter six, there will be a discussion of what we can draw from the findings and how it relates to the research question, before chapter seven concludes by reflecting on how the project contributes to an understanding of learning within local authorities, before acknowledging the project's limitations and recommending further avenues for research.

2. Context

As previously established, the research conducted as part of this dissertation will take place in the London Borough of Camden. This particular borough was chosen as it is one of the more active local authorities in properly engaging with the challenges and opportunities presented by digitalised planning; almost all local authorities have moved the day-to-day processing of planning applications from paper to computers, but Camden has been involved in additional digitalisation schemes, such as digital site notices (Wicks, 2021) and the RIPA (Reducing Invalid Planning Applications) and BOPS (Back Office Planning System) trial schemes (Camden, 2022a). Its willingness to adopt new digital ways of working makes it an ideal case study to investigate. The nature of Camden council in general also makes it appropriate to study, as it frequently acknowledges the need for 'change', 'innovation' and 'bold ambition' in the Camden Plan (Camden, 2022b). An observable organisational identity and character makes it far easier to recognise cultures and communities of learning, a crucial component of organisational change that will be explored later in the literature review. The borough of Camden is located in central London, so its urban character should be noted and reflected on when making conclusions, as this clearly differentiates it from many other local authorities.

It is worth noting that, whilst writing this dissertation, I was offered a job and began working as a Planning Officer there. This took place just before my interviewing and data collection, so naturally gave me easier access to interviewees and an additional insider perspective that I otherwise would not have had. However, while there were benefits to the research project, it is also important to be aware of the potential conflicts of interest this may result in; unlike at the start of the project, I now have a personal connection to the case study being investigated. Therefore, it is especially important to take particular care and consideration when ensuring that ethics standards are subscribed to so that the research is totally impartial and genuinely analytical.

3. Literature Review

This chapter will first introduce the two theories of new institutionalism and public management. The discourse around these subjects will be analysed in order to evaluate their contributions to understandings of how organisations – and more specifically, local authorities – experience change. The chapter will then explore the phenomenon of planning digitalisation and its uptake within local authorities, evaluating how the changes brought by its introduction have affected internal operations and activities. The literature review will finish by identifying gaps in the existing literature and areas where further research is required – providing the foundations for this study.

3.1. New institutionalism and organisational cultures

The literature surrounding the operation of institutions and organisations is complex and extensive, and the topic has remained a significant and popular area of academic research since Weber's foundational work on organisational bureaucracy, 'Economy and Society' (Weber, 2019). Since then, many different theories have been developed to explain how organisations operate with, drive, and experience change; one such theory, institutionalism, has even split into three different strains of institutionalist thinking: historical, ideational, and rational choice institutionalism (Koning, 2015). Separately, academics arguing from an organisational theory perspective have attributed change within organisations to goal setting, stating that it is the aims that translate into actions pursued by individuals and groups that promote change (Linder and Foss, 2018). Other ideational understandings of how institutions operate include rational choice theory, which contradicts the idea that structures define how behaviour emerges, and instead argues that individual actors choose to operate in ways that will bring the largest net benefit to them (Weingast, 1996; Ostrom, 1991). To academics advocating for this framework, behaviour is something that is more or less independent from an organisation's structure and relies on the individual instead.

The school of thinking known as 'new institutionalism', growing out of the social constructivist movement in the 1980s (Rydin, 2003), provides a staunch remonstration to this. Originating

largely from the work of March and Olsen (1996; 1984), this approach argues for the centrality of cultural practices and learned behaviours within institutions. For new institutionalists, the structure of organisations has a direct impact on the way actors behave, rather than the actions of individuals defining the character of an institution. Peters (2005) explains this relationship when he writes:

"rather than being atomistic individuals… acting to maximize personal utility, political actors are argued by the normative institutionalism to reflect more solely the values of the institutions with which they are associated… their values, and therefore their behaviours, shaped by their membership in institutions" (p.26)

When understanding organisations through the perspective of new institutionalism, the actions and behaviours of those within organisations are shaped by the very structures that they operate within, a process sometimes referred to as 'learning' or 'social learning' (Béland, 2005). This can be a difficult concept to define, especially in relation to organisations, but Nilsson's (2005) work on environmental policy integration provides a good descriptor of the activity as: "a reframing process that adjusts policy goals, problem definitions, and strategies" (p.222), or in other words: a way that behaviours are altered to drive change within institutions. New institutionalism can thus be used to explain how actions within organisations are affected by change, as well as how change itself is driven.

It is important to note that this type of learning that brings change is not necessarily conscious or positive. Ideally, the process of learning entails communities of practice that exist within institutions reflecting back on their work, considering the results of their actions, and taking steps where necessary to avoid becoming entrenched in established ways of working – thus becoming 'reflexive practitioners' (Schon, 2008). However, learning can also exist subconsciously; given organisational learning can be understood as arising from structural factors within institutions imposing change, then individuals do not necessarily recognise and consciously make the decision to engage in learning – the process happens naturally as a result of structural forces (Wenger, 2000). Additionally, learning will not always be a positive

experience, as academics have noted that organisational cultures can encourage negative or harmful methods of working too (Wang and Ahmed, 2003).

3.2. Public management and priority control

At the same time as the new institutionalism discourse explores how organisations shape behaviour, others in the literature have investigated how the structuring of organisations serves to establish and entrench norms. The new public management framework understands public administrative organisations as increasingly governed by neoliberal methods of operation commonly associated with the private sector, utilising elements such as quotas, targets, and performance markers (Hanlon, 2018; Lane, 2000), with the clearest feature being "the shift from input to output orientation" (Schedler and Proeller, 2002, p.163). Many academics have focused on this substantial change within the organisation of public administrations, observing how their altered structure and methods leads to cultural changes within the organisation more broadly (Dahl and Soss, 2014). As actors increasingly operate within a neoliberal structure, the norms that they abide by move from those of public service to those of market concerns, such as profitability or efficiency (Broadbent and Laughlin, 2002).

This change in the held norms and beliefs of actors within organisations can be seen as a form of learning, and one that is more indicative of subconscious learning. An organisation adopting neoliberal principles will likely influence actors to restructure their own priorities with measurable outputs as their main focus (Laughlin and Broadbent, 1993). Therefore, changing practices and structures within organisations can enable learning that could be deemed 'negative' given it is detrimental to what is commonly perceived as the 'public good'; Gorz (1989) makes this argument by using the example of carers, contending that over-valuation of quantitative output can limit the provision of welfare (p.143). Individual actors do not consciously decide to shift their priorities and values, but rather market-focused structures within organisations incentivise them to act in ways that value profitability over provision (Naschold, 1996). Thus, the structure of organisations changes both the actions and behaviours of those within them, as well as the principles and values they operate under.

Naturally, the literature surrounding organisation change can be difficult to summarise as it is both extremely extensive and mostly heterogenous in terms of methodology, definitions, and tools for analysis (Iles and Sutherland, 2001, p.12). Nevertheless, the new institutionalist and new public management frameworks can contribute much to an understanding of organisational learning, as they explain how it is that institutional change can bring about shifts in behaviours, practices, norms, and cultures.

3.3. Local authorities and change

The process of organisational change has been a prominent focus of the literature on local governance and public administration, particularly in the era of austerity following the global financial crisis, which many academics argue has forced substantial changes within the public sector (Elliot, 2020; Lippi and Tsekos, 2019; Fuller, 2017). Local government has often been thought of as the level of government most relevant to ordinary people's lives, as it is usually the most accessible layer that citizens have the most frequent contact with (Reilly, 2017). In principle, local government should be "about democratically elected representatives collectively deciding how best to respond to all the differing needs and wishes of the residents of their area" (Wilson and Game, 1994, p.21), but this ideal form is routinely undermined by the reality of political life. Much has been written on the chronic underfunding and under-resourcing of local government in the United Kingdom, noting how local authorities have fought to continue provision of services despite deeply damaging economic cutbacks (Barbera et al., 2021; Gray and Barford, 2018; Gardner, 2017). The result is that local governments are expected to continue to provide for their citizens in the context of a retreating state, which is particularly difficult in unitary states such as the United Kingdom – as Ladner (2017) writes: "[if] municipalities strongly depend on transfers from higher state levels, there is only very limited room to react and to invest" (p.29).

The consequence of the difficult position that local authorities have found themselves in has in many cases taken the form of organisational reform; continuing to operate despite 'state rescaling' and the lack of investment brought about by austerity has led many local authorities to drift from a previously redistributive identity to one defined by entrepreneurialism (Ferry

et al., 2018; Griffiths and Kippin, 2017). In a bid to protect vital services, many have adopted agendas more commonly associated with the private sector, with a clear pro-growth and wealth-generating focus intending to fund continued operation (Lauermann, 2018; Pike et al., 2018; Fuller and West, 2017). Some academics have argued that this kind of market-driven approach to urban governance can present positive opportunities, suggesting that organisational reform is desirable where it results in greater efficiency and growth (Oosterlynck and González, 2013; Harding, 2005). However, many others have pointed out that pro-growth organisational change within local authorities can reinforce institutional cultures that produce actors with bounded rationality, subsequently neglecting and marginalising important priorities such as social regeneration and the tackling of inequalities due to the perceived conflict this may have with securing economic success (Fuller, 2018; Wells, 2018; Cairney, 2016; Ward, 2003). Therefore, the organisational changes that have resulted from austerity present perhaps the best example of how local authorities can experience learning that shifts priorities and undermines cultures. Understanding how changes in organisations can promote learning – both positive and negative, is crucial to this research project's focus on digitalisation.

3.4. Digitalisation in planning

The concept of digital planning, and more specifically the potential for planning 'digitalisation', has gained traction in the UK since the turn of the century, largely in response to the birth of the digital era and criticisms of the existing planning system as archaic and out-of-date (Airey and Doughty, 2020; Evans-Cowley and Hollander, 2010). Put simply, utilising digitalisation and information communication technologies in local authorities is understood as the "use of electronic tools and applications in public administration and the provision of governmental services" (Buffat, 2015, p.150). This definition is clearly broad and seemingly quite simple – however, the reality of implementing digitalisation within planning is complex and requires significant investment and resources (Devlin, 2020). Nick Raynsford (2018) explains this limitation of digitalisation in his report on English planning, writing of the topic: "this opportunity is accepted by all sectors and by government and is restricted only by the resources available for investment" (p.66).

As a result of this, digitalisation in UK planning has been fairly limited in scope of action – even where rudimentary forms are widespread across planning authorities, such as digital data storage systems. The growth of computer technology has impacted the work of planners but has mostly been limited to simplifying routine work, for example through shifting the submission of applications and all their associated documents onto an online portal (Batty, 2021). However, critics have suggested there is a lack of coherence to the use of digital technology in planning, such as in how submissions still do not require a standardised file type, meaning planning documents are stored in a variety of different formats that are often non-searchable or machine-readable (Catapult, 2019). The inadequate and piecemeal nature of digital reforms to planning has been attributed an unwillingness or inability to invest the necessary resources (Hersperger et al., 2021), and even where costs have fallen as technology has improved, there is still the perception amongst many planning professionals that the technology is too expensive (Kitchin, Young, and Dawkins, 2021).

Yet there is growing pressure for planning to digitalise, partly driven by industry demands (Harris and Webb, 2019), partly by government policy (DLUHC, 2021), and partly by public expectation, because "as more and more people use these technologies in their everyday life, so their expectation of using them for their routine engagements with government, politics, and their communities will grow" (Polat and Pratchett, 2009, p.195). Although there has been significant uptake of 'e-democracy' in other European countries such as Spain (Alonso and Barbeito, 2016; Vicente and Novo, 2014), there has been limited emergence in the United Kingdom, with only a select number of local authorities engaging with genuinely innovative digitalisation (Boland et al., 2020). Although limited, the UK Government has begun to encourage the shift to digitalisation, promoting "the transformative potential of digital technology to change the way it does business" (HM Government, 2017, p.3). Consequently, the 'Planning for the future' White Paper detailed as one of its key proposals the greater use of digital technology in planning (MHCLG, 2020), and the Government has announced funds to be made available to ten councils to trial digital practices in planning (HM Government, 2021).

3.5. Local authority experiences with digitalisation

The literature is more limited when it comes to how local authorities have experienced the process of digitalisation – largely because the push for digitalisation and the adoption of digital methods has only existed for the last decade or so. As such, it is difficult to predict how local authorities engaged in digitalisation will experience learning, and much of the literature on the topic is speculative rather than analytical. Although there are some that argue the shift to digital methods has the potential to empower the norms of participation and consultation within local authorities (Pantić et al., 2021; Thoneick, 2021), others are more sceptical. The opposing argument put forward is that an increased focus on digitalisation and the efficiency that it may bring will incentivise actions that prioritise this over provision of services (Jankowski et al., 2019). An additional risk that has generated discussion in the literature is the potential for digitalisation to overtly exclude individuals that are less proficient with technology (Choudrie, Ghinea, and Songunuga, 2013; Kuk, 2003), suggesting that digitalisation within local authorities can result in the learning of behaviours harmful to provision of resident services.

As previously mentioned, there are few case studies to draw on that examine local authority experiences. Of those that do exist, the most commonly observed consequence appears to be the simplification and automation of methods of working, aiming to create an 'end-to-end' digital planning system (Maltby, 2022). One of the most extensive studies into organisational change resulting from digitalisation comes from Devlin (2020), who investigates Coventry City Council's adoption of digital planning functions. In the paper, Devlin writes:

> "as planning departments in local authorities continue to adopt digital solutions and practices that are designed and maintained by private companies… it is reasonable to anticipate local authorities delivering urban planning through a form of neoliberal technocratic partnerships with private digital companies" (p.64).

Although this is only one case study, this example shows the potential for learning within local authorities that fundamentally alters behaviours, ways of working, and accepted norms.

A further study by Devlin and Coaffee (2021) provides further support to this hypothesis through interviews with planning officers, investigating the situation at both Coventry and Leeds City Councils. It also concludes that the digitalisation pursued by both councils has resulted in a greater reliance on outsourced private providers of software and has led to the routinisation of planning work.

As was established in the context section of this study, Camden Council is a local authority that is at the forefront of digitalisation, yet there has been no apparent research into its experiences thus far. In addition to this, the literature focusing on how local authorities experience learning and organisational change tends to focus disproportionately on austerity, so this project aims to fill a gap in the literature by applying the theory to a different context. By focusing on digitalisation – and more specifically Camden Council's experience with it – this study aims to contribute to the literature on organisational change, learning, and digitalisation.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research framework

In order to investigate and understand the ways that local authorities experience learning, this dissertation will use the case study of the digitalisation of planning at the London Borough of Camden. So as to understand this, the study will use the research question laid out in the introduction and repeated here for clarity:

"To what extent do local authorities experience positive or negative organisational learning through implementing the digitalisation of planning?"

Once it has been established how local authorities (and their planning teams) are implementing digitalisation and what specific actions they are taking, the project will be guided by the following four research objectives:

Objective 1: Understanding how digitalisation may have changed the behaviour of planners in ways that have positive impacts on their work;

Objective 2: Understanding how digitalisation may have changed the behaviour of planners in ways that have negative impacts on their work;

Objective 3: Understanding how digitalisation has affected what planners prioritise;

Objective 4: Understanding how digitalisation will continue to affect the work of planners.

These objectives have been chosen as they allow for a thorough examination of the process of organisational learning within local authorities. Both Objective 1 and Objective 2 draw from a new institutionalist perspective and are intended to explore how changes brought about by digitalisation may have led to both positive and negative learning within Camden. Although the terms 'positive' and 'negative' are value-loaded, we can judge that those changes improving the ability of planners to complete their work are positive, and consequences that hinder the ability of planners to complete their work are negative. This

avoids attempting to assess and attribute value to the impacts or outcomes of their work. Objective 3 considers whether changes from digitalisation have had an effect on the norms and values held by individuals within Camden, as theorised by the new public management framework, while Objective 4 intends to investigate the permanency of the changes identified by the three other objectives, in order to assess the significance and scale of any organisational learning.

4.2. Case study

As established earlier in this study, the research will investigate the London Borough of Camden, which will be used to provide an insight into how local authorities experience organisational learning. Given this, the use of a single case study is suitable, as solely analysing one example allows for a more exhaustive investigation that can focus on drawing as much detail as possible (Yin, 2009, p.47). There is also a slight limitation in that it is more difficult to make generalisations from one single study (Gable, 1994), but it should be noted that the purpose of this project is not to necessarily predict the experience that all local authorities will have, but rather to contribute to an understanding of the types of organisational learning that can emerge within local authorities that experience change.

4.3. Semi-structured interviews

This research project relies on interviews to gather data, which provide a crucial insight into the beliefs, views, and perceptions of individuals (Cloke et al., 2004) The interviews conducted were also semi-structured, meaning they follow a rough structure with a distinct line of focus, but are more flexible and able to diverge into different areas of enquiry if necessary. The benefit of this interview method is that interviewees can be pushed to expand and elaborate on their answers, allowing the researcher to delve further into interesting areas of conversation and ensure that a topic is fully explored. There were also limitations to this method, such as the potential for semi-structured interviews to drift in focus away from relevance to the topic and the potential for bias leading the interviewer to search for preconceived ideas. For this reason, it was important that the interviews were conducted

vigilantly, and a recording was used to ensure that all answers could be properly analysed afterwards and any bias in notetaking could be eliminated.

The interviews were guided by seven core questions (see Appendix 1) that were used to prompt discussion, with each question designed as most framed as 'how' questions that allowed for open and flexible discussion, rather than 'why' questions, which tend to be more prescriptive and generate basic answers (Becker, 1998). The core questions also attempted to reflect the research objectives detailed earlier in the chapter by encouraging interviewees to think about how their working behaviour and the organisation more generally has been affected by digitalisation. All interviews were either conducted at Camden's Council's offices or virtually through Microsoft Teams. The interviews lasted between thirty minutes and an hour and were all recorded and later transcribed.

4.4. Interviewees

The five planners that were interviewed all worked at Camden in different positions and at different stages of their career. Their identities have been anonymised, but the table below shows their current role and a letter to categorise them, by which they will be referred.

Identity value	Position in Camden Planning Team
A	Team Manager
B	Deputy Team Manager
C	Principal Planning Officer
D	Senior Planning Officer
E	Planning Officer

Table 1: Summary of interviewees by their identifying letter and role at Camden

4.5. Safety and ethics considerations

Given the interviews involve human participants, every consideration must be made to ensure that the research is as safe and ethical as possible. To avoid any risks associated with isolated and lone interviewing, the UCL risk assessment form was completed beforehand, outlining all actions taken to alleviate and mitigate risk (Appendix 4). Interviews were conducted in either professional places or online, and interviewees were given an information sheet (Appendix 2) pertaining to the project and a consent form (Appendix 3) to complete before any questions were asked. It was made clear to all participants that they would be kept entirely anonymous, and their data treated with the utmost confidentiality. All data from the project (including recordings and transcripts) were stored on a password protected computer, and nothing was shared anywhere else. Once the dissertation has been completed, all data will be deleted.

5. Research Findings

This chapter will briefly present eight key themes that were obtained from the interviews with members of Camden's planning team. All of these topics were commonly referred to by participants, featuring in the majority, if not all, of the interviews conducted. This section will not seek to interpret these themes, but simply present what the views expressed by interviewees were; the next chapter will analyse and discuss the content of the interviews and what they contribute to the research topic.

5.1. Reliance on funding

There was wide consensus amongst all interviewees that digitalisation within Camden was to some degree dependent on the availability of funding and resources. Some used this to explain why the uptake and improvement of digital ways of working had been slow, stating that funds were "drip-fed", or allocated through strange and inefficient models (Interviewees A and B). However, interviewees A and D pointed out that central government were actually beginning to catch up to the potential of digitalisation, and thus making more funds available. Interviewee A remarked that there was "a definite trajectory towards it [digitalisation], the local digital fund has put in quite a lot of money funding a lot of these things". Nevertheless, many of those interviewed emphasised that the work of Camden in digitalising planning depended greatly on the availability of funds and support from central government, as well as support from within Camden Council itself.

5.2. Organisational cultures in conflict

Every interviewee expressed a view that the planning team at Camden would be willing and widely accepting of changes brought about by digitalisation. It was acknowledged that the ongoing process of digitalisation would inevitably result in planners having to learn how to use new tools, programmes, and software – but the interviewees generally saw that as a move that would be welcomed if it were to improve the ability of planners to work efficiently and effectively. Interviewee E expressed the view that the Council as a whole was likely to be

accepting of change, saying "it has always been good at embracing change and new ideas, we are quite a forward-thinking Council", which was a perspective shared my all interviewees. However, both interviewees A and D pointed out that there being so many different teams within the organisation that are interdependent means that any team having an alternative approach to change can create structural barriers.

Interviewee A developed this further, explaining that even if the planning team were willing to embrace change, action cannot be taken unilaterally within the structure of the Council. All changes would have to be signed off by individuals higher within Camden's hierarchy, including those that were not in the planning team. There is no guarantee that these actors would be as enthusiastic to move to different methods of working; indeed, the point was made that the higher the position of an individual, the more responsibility, and thus the more risk averse they are. This therefore raised the issue of there existing multiple organisational cultures within a wider structure, and the institution of Camden Council potentially having a different approach to and understanding of change compared to its constituent parts.

The character of the planning team itself was universally regarded as one that would be accepting of change though, with all interviewees suggesting that planners would be willing to accept developments away from existing methods. As interviewee C said: "as a general team, there's definitely a willingness to embrace new ways of working and try to make improvements". Some interviewees did note that this culture of willingness to change was not necessarily shared by other local authorities elsewhere, and it may be that Camden was unusual in its pro-innovation outlook.

5.3. Path dependent methods of working

Although the planners interviewed spoke of Camden's culture of innovation and change, the point was also raised that individuals may not always be as open to change as the teams they are part of. This point was made by interviewee A, who remarked that people often have different perceptions of whether or not things are working, and what to some people might

require change is acceptable to others. They referred to the effect this has on entrenching the way things are currently done, preventing innovation or positive change. As they put it:

"you'll always come up to resistance, people think if it's something that they've been doing, and it sort of works, then it's fine. There's that *if it ain't broke, don't fix it* mentality, but I think there are different perceptions of when something is broken".

Similarly, interviewees C and D both brought up that people are always wary of change to some degree, and the latter elaborated by explaining that there is a commonly held perception that digital improvements may just be "another thing that doesn't work", especially as planners are aware of the complexity that digital change involves. The role that the generational breakdown of teams has was also mentioned by a number of interviewees, who indicated that younger planners are generally thought of to be more receptive to change, though they pointed out that this did not seem to be the case at Camden.

5.4. Individual innovation

As a subsequent result of organisational barriers and the lack of funding, a number of interviewees reflected on how the implementation of digitalisation depended greatly on individual actors choosing to innovate and propose changes themselves – often without being specifically assigned or directed to do so. Interviewee A explained that, given there is a lack of available resources to create roles and the planning team is not directed to innovate by figures at the top of the Council hierarchy, improvements often come about because of proactive individuals that choose to actively seek solutions or alternative ways of working. Interviewee D agreed, explaining that while a lot of planners are eager to try new things and open to change, there are less that actually get involved – largely because it requires additional commitments when people's workloads are significant enough as it is. Interviewee B concurred, and additionally raised the point that because there is a reliance on individuals giving away their own time to work on digitalisation, the need to bring in outsourced help inevitably emerges, and private companies fill the gaps where individual proactive planners within the local authority can only do so much.

5.5. Automation and improvements to working

Another topic that interviewees were unanimous on was the effect of digitalisation on their day-to-day work. At all levels of seniority within the team there was agreement that the process of digitalisation had to some degree helped to speed up the simpler and routinised aspects of work. Some members of the team, such as interviewee C remarked on how planning digitalisation had changed work from pre-digital, sharing how when they first started work as a planner, everything was physical, paper-based, and manual. The shift to digital processes has meant that now the initial stage of processing and validating an application is far faster, but the most significant shift is in the deciding of applications – as interviewee C put it: "it's much better to have everything online, because everything is at your fingertips…you've just got access to everything, you don't have to physically go to the office to find a file". The use of GIS (Geographic Information System) software was referred to by all interviewees in this context, remarking on its ability to streamline the process of understanding the context of a site.

However, there were clear places where interviewees felt digitalisation was still lacking, and further automation could allow for them to perform their jobs more effectively. Interviewee E spoke of how they spent a large amount of time chasing applicants for the correct drawings for validation, suggesting that digitalisation may have incentivised some applicants to take less care to ensure that they are providing the required documentation when applying through the Planning Portal (the online submission system), as it can be completed through a series of clicks rather than by physically sending in a binder of plans. Their view (which was also shared by a number of interviewees) was that automating this process further would allow planners to spend less of their time working on administrative tasks and more time on the value-adding practice of assessing applications. As interviewee D put it:

"I feel like there are days when I just do admin jobs… I'm not using my brain for what I've been trained for, I'm just a little machine that just clicks on things to put things into place.

And it really frustrates me… because when I went into planning, I didn't think that the admin work would be such a big part of it".

There was a frequently voiced view by all planners interviewed that if digitalisation were to further strip out these routine and monotonous tasks, then planners could focus on "the actual work of planning".

5.6. Perception and distance

A theme that was less commonly raised but nonetheless an important finding was the notion that planning work might be distorted by the use of digital tools – or rather, by the overreliance on digital tools. Interviewee E brought up this dilemma by referring to their use of Google Earth, which allows a planner to observe a site in 3D 'satellite mode', providing an automatically generated 3D render of buildings. They explained how this is commonly used by most planners to observe locations that do not require an in-person site visit, as it still allows for the appreciation of the site in context to the buildings around it without leaving one's desk. However, they also remarked that they feel that this has the potential to skew perceptions of sites, as they are only being seen from a birds-eye perspective that ordinary people will never experience. Interviewee B also referred to this, saying digitalisation has massively reduced the amount of time they spent on physical site visits: "I used to spend entire days driving around doing all my site visits – whereas now I can do them all remotely through Google Earth". Though they then acknowledged that the experience of conducting site visits is an important part of planning work and that it gives an appreciation of the built environment that would otherwise be missing.

5.7. Participation and inclusion

A topic that many interviewees were keen to raise was the impact of digitalisation on participation within planning; although there was a specific planned question relating to consultation, many interviewees had already introduced the topic prior to this question being asked. There were also some differences in perspectives here – interviewees were largely in

agreement that digitalisation could have positive impacts on participation – but they varied on to what degree, as well as the potential for negative impacts. Interviewee D was most enthusiastic about digitalisation's potential to target and reach disadvantaged groups, suggesting that "technology applied well and with proper user testing can understand the needs of the people that you actually do it [planning] for… so there's a lot of work to do, but digitalisation can definitely help understand people more". Similarly, both interviewees A and B voiced the opinion that digitalisation was massively improving the availability of information but was still potentially limited due to outreach failures that are indicative of a problem with planning more widely rather than just digitalisation. Both these interviewees pointed out that planning has always had a problem with representation, and if anything, digitalisation was helping to reach some groups that were previously not invested (particularly the young), whilst those that have always participated in planning have not been cut off.

Interviewee E was slightly more sceptical, suggesting that the process of digitalisation could help with reaching more diverse groups, however noted that at the moment digitalised processes of consultation failed to do so, saying: "People have a right to comment or object on applications, but very few people do. And I don't think it's because people don't care – I think they just don't understand or don't know how – it's somewhere digitalisation just hasn't reached yet.". This sentiment was echoed by interviewee C, who accepted that digitalisation was "the way the world is going" but expressed concern that the pace was too great a speed that it risked leaving some communities behind, excluding those who are not digitally competent and creating a disconnect between some residents and planners.

6. Research Interpretation

As was established in the methodology section of this study, the research set out to address four objectives, all of which contributed to the fundamental research question: "to what extent do local authorities experience positive or negative institutional learning through implementing the digitalisation of planning". To aid the analysis and interpretation of the research results effectively, the following chapter is broken into sections that address each research objective in turn.

6.1. Positive impacts from digitalisation

The first research objective sought to understand how the process of digitalisation may have resulted in positive behavioural changes, and each interviewee did independently raise the perceived benefits that digital change had brought to their work. The factor that appeared to arise most frequently and was often raised first by interviewees was how digital change has sped up the planning process – particularly the more routine and 'monotonous' parts of a planner's job. Each person mentioned this at some point in their interview, and it is clear that the adaptations that digitalisation has made to the ways that planners at Camden work has resulted in a shift in behaviour to promote greater speed. The transition from plans stored in paper form to digital files has had an impact in every area of the process – from submission to decision. This change in behaviour is also quite clearly a form of conscious learning, shown by the fact that each planner was so willing to talk about the issue. The trimming of the length of a process by removing the manual components of posting, filing, and physically noting also is a very tangible change, so it is not surprising that this form of learning is something that planners can self-reflect on.

A second positive area of learning that is closely linked with the first is that of digitalisation creating more time for planners to produce better quality decisions. This too, is a very tangible change in that the automation and simplification of time-consuming administrative tasks through software such as *Northgate M3* and *HP TRIM* has allowed for planners to spend

more time evaluating decisions in detail and generating the best possible decisions. As interviewee D put it:

"if you have more time to think about the assessment of the scheme and balance all of the benefits, have time to listen to people about what they think of it, what they want to experience in a space – and you have that space in your mind – it's really going to improve a lot in terms of spaces, places, buildings, how communities interact, the trust in the system"

The benefit of freeing up time for planners is certainly something that resonated with all interviewees, as each clearly believed that their work would have significantly greater value if they could focus more on the 'planning' side of the job rather than the 'admin' side. This form of positive learning is clearly another conscious one, and one that is driven by overt organisational changes in methods of working.

Although the impact on speed and quality of decision-making were the most prominent positive examples of learning generated from the interviews, the potential to reach previously underrepresented groups was an interesting effect of digitalisation that did not emerge much in the literature review. Indeed, the common assumption amongst many academics is that digitalisation is naturally exclusionary – particularly towards groups such as the elderly, ethnic minorities, and the poorer members of society. However, the belief demonstrated by the planners interviewed was that the shift to digital actually broadened the reach of the planning department beyond those who typically engaged with planning consultation, who tended to be very demographically homogenous. Obviously, it is worth approaching this assertion critically, as it is likely that planners would prefer to think of their work as socially integrative rather than exclusionary, however the claims made in the interview were evidenced. For example, digital site notices do appear to open the door to producing documentation that can be translated into any language digitally, which is just an impractical and unfeasible feature for paper notices. Interestingly, the changing practices introduced by digitalisation do not only cause learning that benefits the working efficiency of planners, but also entrenches behaviour that benefits wider social goals such as participation.

6.2. Negative impacts from digitalisation

The second research objective acted as the inverse equivalent of the first; it sought to understand how planners might find that digitalisation has altered their behaviour to negatively impact their work. As was explained in the previous chapter, one of the main improvements that interviewees approved of was the automation of administrative tasks, but all also pointed out that the separate programmes being used were not necessarily well-integrated. For example, the applications are registered through one software but the documents pertaining to them are stored in a separate data storage programme, and these are entirely separate entities. Although this may seem like an issue with the process of digitalisation rather than a problem with the behaviour of planners, it inevitably changes the job to be more administrative based. The subsequent effect of this is to entrench the norms and behaviour associated with data management rather than planning, resulting in the depreciation of behaviours central to the activity of planning. Instead of focusing on the ability to add value to planning applications and thus center the built environment and the people living in it within their day-to-day work, planners are focusing on the efficient balancing of multiple tasks, which can end up harming their ability to work effectively. Interviewee D summarised this point well, saying:

"The lack of integration between systems and processes triggers my mind to focus on all these things that stop my thinking. It's a blockage in the thinking process and it really shuts me off".

In addition to affecting the ability of planners to carry out their standard tasks, there was also a clear suggestion that, to some degree, digitalisation entrenches path dependent ways of acting. The suggestion from the interviews was that, once a workforce has adopted to a certain way of working, it is difficult to introduce significant change that will impact existing methods to a large degree. The new institutionalist framework in the literature review touched on this, suggesting that structures can introduce ways of working that individuals within subconsciously adopt, and are subsequently bound by. This form of learning appears to be present at Camden (though it is by no means unique to the borough), as planners

continue to work with a poorly integrated set of software that has an adverse effect on their efficiency. Interviewee A's explanation of this situation helps to illustrate this point:

"You can't understate how much resistance to change can slow down digitalisation and general organisational transformation… For us, if we move from M3 to a different back-office planning system, we have to map all those fields across, but they might be in the wrong format. Whereas if your records are poor and not digitalised, then digitalising the system becomes easier".

Clearly, the choice made to digitalise does create some form of path dependency that sets restrictions or limitations on future action. Not only does it practically restrict how change can take place, but it disincentivises planners to seek change if they know that further digitalisation will involve more upheaval in their existing ways of working.

The way that digitalisation has taken place thus far has also involved the adoption of specific programmes or methods in a staccato way – take for example M3, a programme that was introduced a relatively long time ago and is only updated when the need becomes impossible to ignore. This has resulted in a tendency to view change as a series of events, presumably with an end point, rather than an evolutionary process. Digitalisation has in some ways caused a misunderstanding of how change takes place, and interviewees B and D both referenced this in relation to the RIPA and BOPS schemes, which should bring improvements to digital planning, but have not yet generated broad interest across planning teams. This was attributed to a lack of recognition amongst many planners that improvement of digital systems requires sustained involvement.

It is worth also mentioning that many products of digitalisation are provided in part or wholly by private interests. The involvement of outsourcing within the work of local authorities arguably creates a form of corporate dependency, as "the flexibility with how you adapt to and use certain software is massively restricted" (Interviewee A). This links with the new public management framework referenced in the literature review, as the involvement of private interest results in structural limitations on actions that can be taken within an organisation.

6.3. The priorities of planners

The third research objective looked to understand how the priorities of planners were affected by digitalisation. As has already been covered extensively, one of the main changes arising from digitalisation is the potential to massively improve the speed and efficiency of planning work. The literature review showed that one of the main criticisms of digitalisation is that this pursuit of efficiency would end up being prioritised over the quality of decision-making, but the interviews conducted for this project seemed to demonstrate the exact opposite. Every interviewee remarked that the automation and simplification of parts of their job was a overall positive development, as it meant that they could put more of their time into reviewing policy, assessing evidence, and making truly informed decisions. As interviewee B said in relation to efficiency improvements:

"All admin tasks should be more or less autonomous, because I think the best thing a planning officer can add is the value of their time, their experience, and their skills – planning takes a professional judgement and the more that their time is dedicated to using their skills rather than tasks that can be automated, the better".

There was general consensus amongst all those interviewed that the benefit of increased efficiency generated by digitalisation was a means to the end of making better decisions, rather than an end itself.

However, it is worth mentioning that there were some noted issues with regards to the effect on participation. It was noted in the literature review that some academics have argued digitalisation could be used to empower inclusion and consultation, and that notion was shared by some of those interviewed, largely because "access to consultation materials in terms of reach has massively improved" (Interviewee A). Yet there was definitely more concern that participation may be negatively impacted by digitalisation, especially where "things are becoming digitalised quicker than the local community is keeping up" (Interviewee C). A common theme identified by all interviewees was that planning as a whole

is lacking when it comes to outreach and participation, and while everyone did acknowledge that there was the potential for digitalisation to improve this, there was concern amongst some as to the reality of this taking place. One interviewee also pointed out that the shift onto digital forums for consultation seemed to impair participation slightly, using one example of an online consultation event where participation was wider by being able to reach more people, but shallower as the level of actual engagement was lower (Interviewee B). It seems that although planners are aware of the shortfallings of digitalisation when considering participation, the improvements in efficiency are granted more attention. There are clear attempts to rebalance this though, as all interviewees indicated that they were aware of and unsatisfied with the weaknesses of participation.

Additionally, an important area that should be considered when discussing priorities is that of structural limitations. The interviews revealed clear restrictions on the ability of planners to digitally innovate and shape change, arising from both organisational barriers and the inadequacy or complexity of funding methods. Although the planning team was identified as having a very "forward-thinking" culture and being "good at adopting change" (Interviewee E), other teams within the wider organisation of Camden Council was acknowledged to be more "risk-averse" and less likely to embrace significant change (Interviewee A). This situation creates a dilemma that could be termed 'intra-organisational cultures', in which multiple organisational cultures that can affect each other's learning exist within one organisation where teams are interrelated and co-dependent. The more that the ability of planners to innovate and try new methods of working is restricted by structural restraints, the less they can improve the built environment through their work. In this sense, the current priority of planners is constantly searching for ways to adapt to inefficiencies and work within existing structures rather than embrace new methods that could bring improvements to working.

6.4. Looking to future digitalisation

The fourth and final research objective was designed to understand the longer-term impacts of digitalisation, as understanding whether the changes brought about by digitalisation are enduring is crucial to establishing the extent of organisational learning. Judging by each of

the interviews conducted, the changes that have emerged from digitalisation are likely to stay. The planners interviewed all spoke favourably of the effect that automation of administrative tasks has had on their ability to conduct their work, and the fact that it appears to have resulted in positive learning that promotes greater efficiency and better-quality decisions makes it likely that technology and digital reforms simplifying these kinds of tasks will continue to develop. Similarly, the possibility of integrating what is currently a collection of disparate digital programmes is seen as an attractive proposition, so it would be reasonable to expect that digitalisation continues to attempt to streamline the planning process through better coordinated software. However, these changes all rely on the success of existing digitalised schemes such as BOPS and RIPA, as without evidence to promote the continuing digitalisation of planning, there will likely not be enough drive to overcome existing structural barriers. As the literature review showed, institutions are able to drive change but also restrict it, so the extension of further digitalisation depends on whether the learning it drives continues to promote positive change in the work of planners.

It is also reasonable to assume that Camden's pursuit of digitalisation will shift towards valuing participation and consultation more than it currently does; as shown by the interview findings, each planner involved in this study reflected on the weaknesses of participation and demonstrated that they were motivated to improve the current situation. Interestingly, this seems to counter the assumptions of new public management theory that were explored in the literature review, which states that an organisation's structure and priorities will define and shape those working within it. In this case, despite Camden's pro-growth outlook and adoption of management style functions, the planning team clearly have not experienced any change in cultural norms even if their methods of working have been altered. The ability to improve participation obviously goes beyond digitalisation though, and as remarked by a number of interviewees, it is a problem with planning more generally. Even though Camden's planners have not experienced negative learning that reduces the value of participation, a wider cultural shift within the planning system would be a prerequisite to any fundamental change.

On a wider level, planners at Camden that are involved in continuing digitalisation will inevitably have to shift to greater collaborative work between councils. This has already started taking place to some extent, through involvement with councils like Southwark and Lambeth in schemes such as BOPS and RIPA. Inevitably, digitalisation will require more of this kind of collaborative work, especially when working on digital developments like standardised documentation. In addition to this, central government has begun to add conditions to its funding models that require cross-involvement between councils to receive funds (Interviewee A), so this will not only be useful but likely necessary. This kind of change will likely involve significant organisational learning.

The whole process of digitalisation also inevitably relies on funding and government resource support – one of the main findings from the interview process. As identified by the literature review, there seems to have been a recognition amongst central government that digital planning provides a valuable opportunity, so it is reasonable to expect greater focus in years to come. However, the effect that this will have on public sector planners such as those in Camden depends on the organisational culture within the local authority, and how flexible it is to significant change. At Camden, digitalisation has clearly caused a great deal of learning, but has also come into conflict with a more rigid institutional structure, that has limited the extent to which digitalisation can take place. If the funding barrier is lifted, the ability for digitalisation to continue to transform the practices and the learning of planners is dependent on the response of the Council as an organisation.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Summary of findings

This dissertation set out to investigate how local authorities experience learning that is driven by change, using the case study of digitalisation in Camden's planning team to do so. One of the most significant and observable conclusions that can be drawn from this research is that organisational change can have large and significant effects on the way that individuals work; through the interviews conducted with the five planners, it was shown how digital innovations have revolutionised planning work. These changes in the work of planning officers are not necessarily uniform, as both positive and negative impacts were observed through the study. Additionally, the process of learning is by no means consistent, as there exist clear barriers that may obstruct or advance both types of learning.

The most significant barrier to learning identified in this study was that of what we might call 'intra-organisational cultures' – that is, an organisation that cannot be said to have one coherent culture and contains within it multiple communities that may be at odds. Camden Council consists of an incredibly large and complex structure and tends to present itself as a local authority embracing change and welcoming innovation. This is not necessarily incorrect, but the scale of the organisation means that separate teams within it are able to have entirely separate cultures of their own. Although the planning team seems willing to embrace change, it appears restricted by other groups within the Council with different identities, as conflicting approaches prevent action to further develop wider organisational learning.

It is also important to note that local authorities do not exist independently – they are part of a network and functionally lay below central government, upon whom they are reliant for funding and resources. Ultimately, Camden's identity and culture will only be able to develop learning so far if they do not receive the necessary support from government. Many of the positive impacts of digitalisation originate from the innovation that has been brought to ways of working, but many of the negative impacts or inadequate solutions are caused by an inability to develop further or a lack of resources (such as the poor integration between digital

programmes). Therefore, the potential for local authorities to experience positive learning will be limited by the adequacy of support they receive from central government. Fortunately, the current trajectory appears to be towards government appreciating and giving the required support for digital planning, though this is obviously a political decision that is thus dependent on party politics.

The study has therefore answered the research question by showing that digitalisation can bring both positive and negative impacts, with the former dependent on the ability of planners to innovate and make change, and the latter dependent on the provision or lack of resources. This tells us that local authorities are adaptive institutions that can adjust to change in order to extract benefits, but failures and negative learning will emerge where they are not supported in doing so.

7.2. Limitations to research

The most obvious and seemingly significant limitation to this research project is the fact that only one local authority was studied in order to investigate a phenomenon applicable to any local authority, and the case study itself was also unusual in that Camden is more pro-change and more affluent than most local authorities. The key reason for this was that there were not the available resources to collect data from multiple planning authorities, but the use of a single case study does also have value, as explained in the methodology section. This is because it allows for more in-depth, thorough, and rigorous evaluation of the research topic. However, it cannot be denied that the research is limited in its ability to make generalisations; although the research is able to inform and contribute to the literature on learning in local authorities, the findings cannot claim to be universally applicable.

Additionally, it should be mentioned that at the time of conducting the research and writing the study, I began working within the Camden planning team – as acknowledged in the methodology section of this study. In many ways this grants a useful perspective, but it should also be appreciated as a potential limitation. However, every effort was made to ensure that the research remained as evaluative and suitably critical as possible.

7.3. Recommendations and further study

In light of the findings of this research project, it would be extremely useful to conduct similar studies in other local authorities – particularly those of significantly different contexts. As has already been touched on, Camden is an urban, pro-change, affluent borough, so the application of these conclusions could be potentially limited. Applying this research methodology to different contexts such as a rural or a demographically different local authority would allow for comparisons to be made, and the similarities and/or differences between contexts to be better understood.

While the aforementioned potential area of study could function as a direct continuation to this study, it would also be interesting to delve into some of the findings that are not so starkly related. In particular, the concept of 'intra-organisational cultures' presents a fascinating area for discussion, as this was not something that appeared to be present in the discourse surrounding local authorities and organisational learning when the literature review was being conducted. The presence of such cultures within organisations could have serious potential impacts on the ability of learning to take place, so this would be an interesting future topic for academics in this area of research to study.

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Appendix 1 – Interview Questions

1) What digital tools, methods, and technologies do you use in your planning work at Camden?

2) What are the main differences you have noticed that planning digitalisation makes to your day-to-day work?

3) How has digitalisation affected the processing of applications?

4) How has digitalisation affected consulting on applications?

5) How has digitalisation affected the process of deciding on applications?

6) How would you judge the impact of digitalisation on the work of planners at Camden?

7) What do you foresee as the future of planning digitalisation?

Information Sheet

Project Title: How do local authorities experience organisational learning in response to changing practices: a case study of the digitalisation of planning at the London Borough of Camden

Researcher: Sam FitzPatrick

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research project being undertaken by a Masters student from the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London (UCL).

Before you decide whether or not to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being conducted and what participation will involve. Please read the following information carefully, feel free to discuss it with others if you wish, or ask the researcher for clarification or further information. Please take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Why is this research being conducted?

The aim of this project is to investigate how local authorities experience organisational learning in the face of changing practices or contexts. There is a fair amount of research into institutional change, but less relating to local authorities specifically, and less still relating to subsequent organisational learning that may occur. This project aims to contribute to this discourse by analysing a specific case study – that of the London Borough of Camden and its experience with planning digitalisation.

Why am I being invited to take part?

You are being invited to take part due to the fact that you work in planning at the London Borough of Camden. To better understand the context of digitalisation at this local authority, I need to have detailed conversations with planners that work there, so you have been chosen to take part because you are a practicing planner in the Camden Planning team.

Do I have to participate?

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do choose to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw from the research at any time with no consequences and without having to give a reason.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

If you do choose to participate, your participation will involve a 30-to-40-minute semi-structured interview that will take the form of a conversation. This will be recorded but will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be anonymised, stored on a password-protected computer, and deleted once this work has been completed. You will not be personally identified in the final report, but instead by a general identifier (e.g. Planning Officer A) and a reference to your position within the Planning Team. Any quotes will not be directly attributed to you.

What are the advantages of taking part?

There are no immediate benefits for participating in this project and no financial incentive or reward is offered.

What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?

There should be no significant disadvantages associated with taking part in this project. If you experience any unexpected adverse consequences as a result of taking part in the project you are encouraged to contact the researcher as soon as possible using the contact details on page 2 of this information and consent sheet.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The data collected in this project will be written up as a dissertation to be submitted for the award of a Masters degree at University College London (UCL). If you would like an electronic copy of any outputs stemming from this project, please ask the primary contact below who will be happy to provide this.

Contact Details

If you would like more information or have any questions or concerns about the project or your participation, please use the contact details below:

Primary contact	Sam FitzPatrick
Role	MSc student
Email	samuel.fitzpatrick.21@ucl.ac.uk
Supervisor	Elena Besussi
Role	MSc dissertation supervisor
Email	e.besussi@ucl.ac.uk
Telephone	020 3108 9529

Concerns and / or Complaints

If you have concerns about any aspect of this research project please contact the MSc student contact the student in the first instance, then escalate to the supervisor.

Informed Consent Sheet

If you are happy to participate, please complete this consent form by ticking the boxes to acknowledge the following statements and signing your name at the bottom of the page.

Please give the signed form to the researcher conducting your interview at the interview. They will also be able to explain this consent form further with you, if required.

1.	I have read and understood the information sheet.	☐
2.	I agree to participate in the above research by attending a face-to-face interview as described on the Information Sheet.	☐
3.	I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary.	☐
4.	I understand that I may withdraw at any time without giving a reason and with no consequences.	☐
5.	I agree for the interview to be audio recorded.	☐
6.	I understand that I may see a copy of the interview transcript after it has been transcribed and agree any amendments with the researcher.	☐
7.	I understand that the intention is that interviews are anonymised and that if any of my words are used in a research output that they will not be directly attributed to me unless otherwise agreed by all parties.	☐
8.	I understand the data from this project will be considered for repository in the UCL Open Access repository as described on the Information Sheet but that this will be anonymised data only.	☐
9.	I understand that I can contact the student who interviewed me at any time using the email address they contacted me on to arrange the interview, or the dissertation supervisor using the contact details provided on page 2 of the information sheet.	☐

Participant name: **Signature:**   **Date:**

Researcher name: **Signature:**   **Date:**

Ethical Clearance Pro Forma

It is important for you to include all relevant information about your research in this form, so that your supervisor can give you the best advice on how to proceed with your research.

You are advised to read though the relevant sections of UCL's Research Integrity guidance to learn more about your ethical obligations.

Submission Details

1. **Name of programme of study:**

Spatial Planning

2. **Please indicate the type of research work you are doing (Delete that which do not apply):**
    o   Dissertation in Planning (MSc)

3. **Please provide the current working title of your research:**

How do local authorities experience learning in response to changing practices: a case study of the digitalisation of planning at the London Borough of Camden.

4. **Please indicate your supervisor's name:**

Elena Besussi

Research Details

5. **Please indicate here which data collection methods you expect to use. (Tick all that apply/or delete those which do not apply.)**

    o   Interviews
    o   Questionnaires (including oral questions)

6. **Please indicate where your research will take place (delete that which does not apply):**
    o   UK only

7. **Does your project involve the recruitment of participants?**
    'Participants' means human participants and their data (including sensor/locational data and observational notes/images.)

    Yes

Appropriate Safeguard, Data Storage and Security

8. Will your research involve the collection and/or use of personal data?

Personal data is data which relates to a living individual who can be identified from that data or from the data and other information that is either currently held, or will be held by the data controller (you, as the researcher).

This includes:
- Any expression of opinion about the individual and any intentions of the data controller or any other person toward the individual.
- Sensor, location or visual data which may reveal information that enables the identification of a face, address etc. (some post codes cover only one property).
- Combinations of data which may reveal identifiable data, such as names, email/postal addresses, date of birth, ethnicity, descriptions of health diagnosis or conditions, computer IP address (of relating to a device with a single user).

Yes

9. Is your research using or collecting:
- special category data as defined by the General Data Protection Regulation*, and/or
- data which might be considered sensitive in some countries, cultures or contexts?

*Examples of special category data are data:
- which reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership;
- concerning health (the physical or mental health of a person, including the provision of health care services);
- concerning sex life or sexual orientation;
- genetic or biometric data processed to uniquely identify a natural person.

No

10. Do you confrm that all personal data will be stored and processed in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR 2018)? (Choose one only, delete that which does not apply)

- o Yes

11. I confirm that:

- The information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge.
- I will continue to reflect on and update these ethical considerations in consultation with my supervisor.

Yes

Approved by Elena Besussi on 4 April 2022

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM
FIELD / LOCATION WORK

UCL

DEPARTMENT/SECTION: BARTLETT SCHOOL OF PLANNING
LOCATION(S): LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM
PERSONS COVERED BY THE RISK ASSESSMENT: SAM FITZPATRICK

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF FIELDWORK (including geographic location): COMPLETE HERE

COVID-19 RELATED GENERIC RISK ASSESSMENT STATEMENT:
Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. The virus spreads primarily through droplets of saliva or discharge from the nose when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Droplets fall on people in the vicinity and can be directly inhaled or picked up on the hands and transferred when someone touches their face. This risk assessment documents key risks associated fieldwork during a pandemic, but it is not exhaustive and will not be able to cover all known risks, globally. This assessment outlines principles adopted by UCL at an institutional level and it is necessarily general. Please use the open text box 'Other' to indicate any contingent risk factors and control measures you might encounter during the course of your dissertation research and writing.

Please refer to the Dissertation in Planning Guidance Document (available on Moodle) to help you complete this form.

Hazard 1: Risk of Covid -19 infection during research related travel and research related interactions with others (when face-to-face is possible and/or unavoidable)
Risk Level - Medium /Moderate

Existing Advisable Control Measures: Do not travel if you are unwell, particularly if you have COVID-19 symptoms. Self-isolate in line with NHS (or country-specific) guidance.

Avoid travelling and face-to-face interactions; if you need to travel and meet with others:

- If possible, avoid using public transport and cycle or walk instead.

- If you need to use public transport travel in off-peak times and follow transport provider's and governmental guidelines.

- Maintain (2 metre) social distancing where possible and where 2 metre social distancing is not achievable, wear face covering.

- Wear face covering at all times in enclosed or indoor spaces.

- Use hand sanitiser prior to and after journey.

- Avoid consuming food or drinks, if possible, during journey.

- Avoid, if possible, interchanges when travelling - choose direct route.

- Face away from other persons. If you have to face a person ensure
that the duration is as short as possible.

- Do not share any items i.e. stationary, tablets, laptops etc. If items need to be shared use disinfectant wipes to disinfect items prior to and after sharing.

- If meeting in a group for research purposes ensure you are following current country specific guidance on face-to-face meetings (i.e rule of 6 etc.)

- If and when possible meet outside and when not possible meet in venues with good ventilation (e.g. open a window)

- If you feel unwell during or after a meeting with others, inform others you have interacted with, self-isolate and get tested for Covid-19

- Avoid high noise areas as this mean the need to shout which increases risk of aerosol transmission

of the virus.

- Follow one way circulation systems, if in place. Make sure to check before you visit a building.

- Always read and follow the visitors policy for the organisation you will be visiting.

- Flush toilets with toilet lid closed.

-'Other' Control Measures you will take (specify):

NOTE: The hazards and existing control measures above pertain to Covid-19 infection risks only. More generalised health and safety risk may exist due to remote field work activities and these are outlined in your Dissertation in Planning Guidance document. Please consider these as possible 'risk' factors in completing the remainder of this standard form. For more information also see: <u>Guidance Framework for Fieldwork in Taught and MRes Programmes, 2021-22</u>

Consider, in turn, each hazard (white on black). If **NO** hazard exists select **NO** and move to next hazard section.

If a hazard does exist select **YES** and assess the risks that could arise from that hazard in the risk assessment box.

Where risks are identified that are not adequately controlled they must be brought to the attention of your Departmental Management who should put temporary control measures in place or stop the work. Detail such risks in the final section.

ENVIRONMENT	The environment always represents a safety hazard. Use space below to identify and assess any risks associated with this hazard
e.g. location, climate, terrain, neighbourhood, in outside organizations, pollution, animals.	Examples of risk: adverse weather, illness, hypothermia, assault, getting lost. Is the risk high / medium / low ? Low – interviews will be conducted over zoom, so no locational risk will be experienced.

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk

	work abroad incorporates Foreign Office advice
	only accredited centres are used for rural field work
	participants will wear appropriate clothing and footwear for the specified environment

	refuge is available
	work in outside organisations is subject to their having satisfactory H&S procedures in place
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

EMERGENCIES	**Where emergencies may arise use space below to identify and assess any risks**
e.g. fire, accidents	Examples of risk: loss of property, loss of life

CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	participants have registered with LOCATE at http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/
	contact numbers for emergency services are known to all participants
	participants have means of contacting emergency services
	a plan for rescue has been formulated, all parties understand the procedure
	the plan for rescue /emergency has a reciprocal element
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

FIELDWORK   **1**   May 2010

EQUIPMENT	**Is equipment used?**	**NO**	**If 'No' move to next hazard** **If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any** **risks**
e.g. clothing, outboard motors.	Examples of risk: inappropriate, failure, insufficient training to use or repair, injury. Is the risk high / medium / low ?		

CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	the departmental written Arrangement for equipment is followed
	participants have been provided with any necessary equipment appropriate for the work
	all equipment has been inspected, before issue, by a competent person
	all users have been advised of correct use
	special equipment is only issued to persons trained in its use by a competent person
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

LONE WORKING	Is lone working a possibility?	YES	If 'No' move to next hazard If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. alone or in isolation lone interviews.	Examples of risk: difficult to summon help. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

Low risk – interviews will be conducted over zoom so there is no threat regarding isolation. Departmental guidance on lone work will be followed but no emergency procedures required.

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk
X	the departmental written Arrangement for lone/out of hours working for field work is followed
	lone or isolated working is not allowed
	location, route and expected time of return of lone workers is logged daily before work commences
	all workers have the means of raising an alarm in the event of an emergency, e.g. phone, flare, whistle
	all workers are fully familiar with emergency procedures
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

FIELDWORK   2   May 2010

ILL HEALTH	The possibility of ill health always represents a safety hazard. Use space below to identify and assess any risks associated with this Hazard.
e.g. accident, illness, personal attack, special personal considerations or vulnerabilities.	Examples of risk: injury, asthma, allergies. Is the risk high / medium / low? Low – interviews will take place over zoom so no risk of physical harm.
CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk

	all participants have had the necessary inoculations/ carry appropriate prophylactics
	participants have been advised of the physical demands of the research and are deemed to be physically suited
	participants have been adequate advice on harmful plants, animals and substances they may encounter
	participants who require medication should carry sufficient medication for their needs
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

TRANSPORT	Will transport be required	NO	X	Move to next hazard
		YES		Use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. hired vehicles	Examples of risk: accidents arising from lack of maintenance, suitability or training			
	Is the risk high / medium / low?			
CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk			

	only public transport will be used
	the vehicle will be hired from a reputable supplier
	transport must be properly maintained in compliance with relevant national regulations
	drivers comply with UCL Policy on Drivers http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/college_drivers.php
	drivers have been trained and hold the appropriate licence
	there will be more than one driver to prevent driver/operator fatigue, and there will be adequate rest periods
	sufficient spare parts carried to meet foreseeable emergencies
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

DEALING WITH THE	Will people be	NO	If 'No' move to next hazard

PUBLIC	dealing with public		If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. interviews, observing	Examples of risk: personal attack, causing offence, being misinterpreted. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk
☐	all participants are trained in interviewing techniques
☐	advice and support from local groups has been sought
☐	participants do not wear clothes that might cause offence or attract unwanted attention
☐	interviews are conducted at neutral locations or where neither party could be at risk
☐	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

FIELDWORK 3 May 2010

WORKING ON OR NEAR WATER	Will people work on or near water?	NO	If 'No' move to next hazard If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. rivers, marshland, sea.	Examples of risk: drowning, malaria, hepatitis A, parasites. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

CONTROL MEASURES	Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk
☐	lone working on or near water will not be allowed
☐	coastguard information is understood; all work takes place outside those times when tides could prove a threat
☐	all participants are competent swimmers
☐	participants always wear adequate protective equipment, e.g. buoyancy aids, wellingtons
☐	boat is operated by a competent person
☐	all boats are equipped with an alternative means of propulsion e.g. oars
☐	participants have received any appropriate inoculations

	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

MANUAL HANDLING (MH)	**Do MH activities take place?**	**NO**	**If 'No' move to next hazard**
			If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. lifting, carrying, moving large or heavy equipment, physical unsuitability for the task.	Examples of risk: strain, cuts, broken bones. Is the risk high / medium / low?		

CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**
	the departmental written Arrangement for MH is followed
	the supervisor has attended a MH risk assessment course
	all tasks are within reasonable limits, persons physically unsuited to the MH task are prohibited from such activities
	all persons performing MH tasks are adequately trained
	equipment components will be assembled on site
	any MH task outside the competence of staff will be done by contractors
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

SUBSTANCES	Will participants work with substances	NO	If 'No' move to next hazard If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
e.g. plants, chemical, biohazard, waste	Examples of risk: ill health - poisoning, infection, illness, burns, cuts. Is the risk high / medium / low?		
CONTROL MEASURES	**Indicate which procedures are in place to control the identified risk**		

	the departmental written Arrangements for dealing with hazardous substances and waste are followed
	all participants are given information, training and protective equipment for hazardous substances they may encounter
	participants who have allergies have advised the leader of this and carry sufficient medication for their needs
	waste is disposed of in a responsible manner
	suitable containers are provided for hazardous waste
	OTHER CONTROL MEASURES: please specify any other control measures you have implemented:

OTHER HAZARDS	Have you identified any other hazards?	NO	If 'No' move to next section If 'Yes' use space below to identify and assess any risks
i.e. any other hazards must be noted and assessed here.	Hazard: Risk: is the risk		
CONTROL MEASURES	**Give details of control measures in place to control the identified risks**		

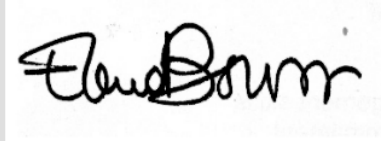| Have you identified any risks that are not adequately controlled?	NO	X	Move to Declaration
	YES		Use space below to identify the risk and what action was taken

DECLARATION	The work will be reassessed whenever there is a significant change and at least annually. Those participating in the work have read the assessment.
	Select the appropriate statement:

□ I the undersigned have assessed the activity and associated risks and declare that there is no significant residual

risk

□ I the undersigned have assessed the activity and associated risks and declare that the risk will be controlled by

the method(s) listed above

NAME OF SUPERVISOR   Elena Besussi

[signature]

FIELDWORK   5   April 2022

BPLN0039_RRYK1

FINAL GRADE

/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

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